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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL
DOUBLE INDEMNITY FOR A RIVER BUM

by BRETT HALLIDAY

A battered old human derelict lay dead and with his strange passing the word went down the river. "Find Mike Shayne and hit him tonight. I want him dead before dawn." Could Shayne escape a gang death sentence? 2 to 43

NEW TRUE CRIME FEATURE

THE KANSAS CITY STORY DAVID MAZROFF 92

NEW COMPLETE NOVELET

MURDER IS NO MAN'S FRIEND WILLIAM JEFFREY 50

EXCITING SHORT STORIES

UNDER THE FIG TREE HAIM BEN-DOV 44

LEO MARGULIES PUBLISHER THE THORN GEORGE F. BELLEFONTAINE 69

CYLVIA KLEINMAN EDITORIAL DIRECTOR THE BALANCE OF JUSTICE ROBERT COLBY 76

HOLMES TAYLOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR HERE, KITTY J. SIMMONS SCHEB 118

DANGER FOR MR. WONG DAN ROSS 125

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Double Indemnity for a River Bum



by BRETT HALLIDAY

All down the Miami River the word had gone, a death sentence without reprieve. "Hit him tonight. I want Mike Shayne dead before dawn." Could he escape—and how?

MIKE SHAYNE was eating a late steak at the marble counter of Benny's All Night Restaurant in downtown Miami when Sergeant Milliken of the homicide squad took the seat beside him.

The sergeant shook the rain off his grey felt hat and hung his raincoat on a hook.

"It ain't a fit night out for man or beast," he told Mike Shayne. "Let alone to say good-by to an old friend. Friend of yours he was, too, Mike."

"Somebody retiring?" the redhead inquired between bites.

"You might call it that," Milliken said. "On the other hand you might not. It's old Willy Burk on the river. We got a call an hour ago there was trouble on his boat. By the time a squad car found the place it was all over. Looked like somebody'd tried to cut a lace pattern in Willy's hide with a skinning knife. It was pitiful. A harmless old goat like Willy. Pitiful."

"I'll buy that part of it," Shayne

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



said. "I'll also buy the 'lightning strikes twice in the same place' bit for this one. I was supposed to go see Willy in the next day or so."

"What about?" The sergeant seemed surprised.

"About his insurance," Shayne said cryptically. "Got any idea who pulled the shiv on him?"

"That's the hell of it," Milliken said, and began to put sauce on the steak young Bill the counterman had just set down in front of him. "Neighbors—if you can call them river bums that—heard yelling and smashing around. Didn't see anything of course. Didn't want to. Ask me, they called us more to get old Willy in trouble than to help him out. The lab boys are down there now trying to find prints on the grease-covered junk the boat's full of. Fat chance."

Milliken put a big piece of tender meat in his mouth and chewed appreciatively. "What's this damn nonsense about insurance? Old Willy-by-the-river?"

"I'm not kidding," Shayne said. "You know I work for one of the biggest companies in that line. Well, yesterday I got a call from their local sales agent. Willy's life had just been insured in the amount of fifty thousand dollars—double indemnity for accidental or violent death."

"You're joking? I don't know much about rates, but seems to me the premium alone would be more money than old Willy saw in any one year of his life."

"That's what the agent seemed to think," Shayne said. "He wanted me to see what I could find out about it. Said when they finally caught Willy for a physical exam, he claimed to know nothing at all. Didn't even admit he knew a policy had been applied for. It went into effect two days ago, though. Whether he knew it or not. Now they're not going to want to pay off of course."

"They better," Milliken said. "The old boy's dead for sure, and it weren't no natural causes. Them companies make me sick. Grab the premiums every time but won't ever turn loose a cent."

"Not my fault," Shayne said. "I'm just hired to do a job."

"I know, Mike. It's never anybody's fault, seems like. On the other hand who stands to collect on the payola this time? We'll want him to prove where he was a couple hours ago."

"I figured maybe you would," Shayne said. "Of course you know I can't tell you officially, but you go prod the insurance firm enough, and it'll turn out to be—"

He consulted a worn black leather notebook from his breast pocket. "Yeah, here it is. The Ace Import and Export Corporation. That's right. The corporation itself is the beneficiary. Man to see is their president. Name of R. Gonzalez. Don't let on where you got the lead though."

Milliken favored him with a broad

wink. "Sure, Mike. Sure. And here's a tip for you. You better get on down there if you want to look over the scene of the crime. Boys should be there a few minutes longer. Tell 'em I sent you."

Mike Shayne got regretfully to his feet and paid his check. It was air-conditioned, cool and above all dry in Benny's All Night. Outside it was a typical Miami summer night — the approximate twin for heat and damp of the Borneo rain forest. The thermometer stood on the high side of ninety and rain was coming down at a rate of close to three inches in an hour. That's a lot of rain.

There were still people on the streets at midnight, but none of them seemed very happy about it. In that heat a man got as hot from sweating inside a slicker as he would have from the unshielded rain. People put their heads down and hurried, bumped into each other and snarled at the contact. The only show of animation was provided by a couple of tired hookers on the corner competing for the attention of a drunken convention delegate.

Shayne hunched his own shoulders and stepped out into the downpour.

It was only a few blocks to the stretch of river bank where Willy Burk and assorted other river dwellers tied their craft. Mike Shayne knew he was going to get wet anyway, so he didn't bother



to go get his car from the parking garage.

At no time in his seventy years had Willy Burk lived in the high-rent district, and the place of his death was no exception. The aged forty-foot boat he'd converted for a home was tied to the north bank of the Miami River in a depressed downtown section. Some fifteen assorted craft in more or less extreme conditions of dilapidation hugged the bank opposite a weed-grown and junk-piled vacant lot.

The river, in a state of nearly totally impure sewage at this point, flowed sluggishly under and about their rotting hulls. The surface was lashed, but hardly improved, by squalls of driving rain.

Due to the excitement of the murder most of the boats were lit up when Shayne reached the scene. Some had long cords plugging into electric outlets. Others, more independent or impecunious as the case might be, showed the softer glow of old fashioned kerosene lamps. A

crowd was milling about on the bank near old Willy's boat.

Shayne shoved his way through and went out the rickety gangplank into the craft's wheelhouse. A couple of bored homicide detectives and a tired lab technician were more or less aimlessly poring through the heaped up debris and trivia below decks without much hope of finding a clue. They recognized the big private-eye. The deceased had already departed on his last ride to the police morgue.

"You again, shamus," one of the men said. "Do you just like murders? Or was this another one of your big time clients?"

Shayne shrugged some of the rain-water off his shoulders onto the worn deck planking.

"Not exactly," he said. "Will Gentry just asked me to stop by and see how you boys were doing. Said if you'd already managed to sink this tub, I should let you go down with her. What happened here tonight?"

"Murder happened."

"You a joker or something?" Shayne asked with deceptive mildness. "It's pretty late at night for fun and games."

"All right. No fun and games," the other said. "Sometime between dark and now a party or parties unknown boarded this rats' cradle of sleep. Some of the neighbors say one man walked in from the street. Another votes for a boatload of pirates with rings in their ears. Nobody

saw them close enough to be sure of anything at all.

"Anyway, whoever it was did a fine job of cutting up the old seadog before he or they left. Thirty-two separate and distinct stab wounds besides a few more possibles. All with a knife. The body was bled white as a slaughtered hog, if I do say it who am an old country boy."

"Anything missing to show motive?" Shayne asked.

"Are you kidding?" The man waved his hand around the wheelhouse and pointed down the hatch.

The whole boat was crammed with ancient, mostly foul smelling junk. Piles of old clothes, both men's and women's, were lying about. There were ancient and rusted skillets, aluminum pots with and without holes, pieces of scrap metal and termite-eaten two-by-fours, old newspapers and brown shopping bags, empty cigarette cartons, tin cans and fishing gear.

"This wasn't a man," the homicide detective said. "This was the giant, economy size all-time-world champion pack rat. There could of been enough stuff carted out of here to load a truck, and we'd have no way of guessing it."

"You wouldn't say the motive was robbery then?"

"I wouldn't say anything, Shayne, except old Willy's dead. Unless it was a grudge killing, robbery's most likely it. Lots of these old goats keep a sock full of cash around some place. You know that. Even if they

don't, somebody could think they do, which is just as dangerous in the long run."

"Besides," his partner added, "it didn't even have to be money. There's plenty along the river would cut throats for what was left in a whiskey bottle."

"I know," Shayne said. "Well, like I told you, I do represent an insurance outfit and they want me to look into this. Sergeant Milliken told me to come on over. When you boys finish your jobs go on in. I'll lock up here."

The police were obviously anxious to get going, and not inclined to question Shayne's statement. All of them knew him to be a close personal friend of the Chief. Besides, they must have thought, what harm could anybody do to a grubby little nickel and dime case such as this one. They gathered their equipment and left.

II

THE CROWD OF nieghbors outside decided nothing more was going to happen that would justify standing around in the rain. By twos and threes they drifted back to their own boats.

Before long Mike Shayne had the place to himself.

The first thing he did was to take out a cigar and light it with an old fashioned wooden match. Then he swept the litter off a rocking chair sitting incongruously in the cabin

below decks and sat himself down to think.

Mike Shayne was first and foremost a practical man. Someone else might have tried to search through the great accumulation of little or nothing that filled the boat to overflowing. Shayne preferred to wait until he had some idea what he might be looking for. Otherwise he was quite likely to pass over some vital clue without ever recognizing that he'd done so.

At the moment his big trouble, as he rapidly discovered, was in trying to figure out where to start thinking at all. Except for the matter of the over-sized insurance policy that had been placed on the corpse's life, everything would have been very simple indeed. A killing of the sort wasn't unusual along the river. Mostly it would rate no more than five lines on the back page of the daily paper and then be forgotten. It was sad but true that almost nobody really cared about these people.

Still somebody had cared one hundred thousand dollars worth for Willy Burk. Cared enough, that is, to put up a substantial cash premium on a policy. That wasn't hay.

The insurance company and the police were going to react in the same way. They'd assume that whoever paid the premium had something to do with the murder. Either he killed old Willy himself or arranged to have it done. There were plenty of people in town who'd

have done the job for a hundred dollars. Shayne could think of a dozen names without half trying.

It was the simple and natural assumption under the circumstances. The private detective was surprised to find that in this case he didn't agree.

For one thing the insurance beneficiary would have to be an absolute idiot not to know he'd be the first suspect. He'd be investigated, checked, back-tracked and gone over with a fine tooth comb.

If he were guilty of murder he'd have only a minute chance of getting away with it. Even the slightest suspicious evidence would certainly hold up payment of the insurance pending years of expensive litigation. Anyone too stupid to know that wouldn't be likely to have the sort of cash required to pay the premium.

Also it was too pat an explanation. Anyone who spends his life in criminal investigation, whether private or public, can't help but grow a very personal instinct that tells him when a situation or a theory is right. To Shayne this one wasn't.

He knew he had to investigate the insurer, if only to find out why he had placed the policy. What made Willy Burk worth a hundred thousand dollars to an export-import company. Was old Willy a smuggler, or at least part of a smuggling ring? Did he have special talents or abilities? If so what? Apparently

nobody else had ever spotted them if he did.

At least, Shayne felt, a study of the export-import company might give him a clue.

He reached over and turned out the single kerosene lamp that had been left burning and sat for a few moments in the dark. Sometimes it helped him concentrate to blot out visual distractions. It wasn't pitch dark of course. Even on the river there was reflected city light from the low hanging clouds. He could see well enough not to fall over anything in the cabin if he chose to move about.

Narrow it down, he told himself. What possible motives could inspire the killing of an eccentric old river rat?

First and most likely would be robbery. It might have been money the thief was after, or it might have been something else which Willy owned or kept on the boat. A treasure map? Evidence good for blackmail? Something being smuggled in like diamonds or dope?

It might have been anything. Willy Burk himself might not even have known the difference or why it was valuable. It might have been whiskey or food.

To eliminate competition if the old man had been a part of some criminal operation? Worth looking into.

Perhaps to remove someone of value to Ace Import-Export? To



get rid of whatever made him worth insuring?

Maybe a personal motive? hatred? jealousy? a grudge out of the distant past? This seemed the least likely.

How about fear of something Willy Burk could betray to the authorities? Revenge for a past betrayal?

Idle speculation, Shayne decided, was getting him nowhere. He could go on listing possible motives all night. The trouble was that no one of them seemed any more probable than the others with the meagre facts he had at hand.

It might just as well be that the

old man had been killed for the insurance money.

Shayne put out his cigar and got to his feet. He stretched and decided to go home and get some rest. Then he froze.

Someone was coming across the vacant lot directly towards the murder boat. By looking through the port he could see a dark blur of a figure wrapped in a raincoat of some sort. Whoever it was made no attempt at concealment or quiet.

He came right along, splashing in puddles of rainwater and stumbling on some of the ground litter. He had something tied around his head and kept it turned to the ground so no face was visible.

Shayne heard rapid footsteps on the gangway and then the decking over his head. A figure started down the companion ladder to the cabin with its back to the room. Partway down the intruder had a moment of intuition, or more likely smelled stale cigar smoke. It stopped on the ladder.

Shayne reached out and caught hold of the right ankle. The reaction was instant. The left leg kicked backwards and out. Unprepared as the detective was, the heel fetched him a nasty clout on the jaw. He staggered back into the cabin but kept his grip just above the right foot. As a natural result the newcomer was pulled off the ladder, and his weight in turn yanked the big man off balance.

They fell together onto the heaped

and cluttered cabin decking, and scrambled wildly in the dark. The intruder was strong and doubly strengthened by fright and a desire to escape. Shayne was an experienced rough and tumble fighter but it took several minutes and the receiving end of half a dozen nasty cracks before he managed to pin the other's body under him and get both flailing wrists pinioned in one of his big hands.

"Quiet down," he said roughly then, "or I'll really have to hurt you."

The only answer was a wild flurry as the other tried to buck him off. Shayne managed to keep control.

"One more like that," he said, "and I'll clobber you. I mean it."

"Oh you do?" said a feminine voice, rather hoarse from exertion. "Who are you and what are you doing here anyway?"

Shayne jumped with surprise and the woman under him managed to throw him off balance and scramble aside. A moment later she was back at the ladder. Shayne caught her ankle again.

"Look," he said, "This is where we came in. Give up. All I want to do is talk."

"What are you?" the voice said. "Fuzz?"

"No," Shayne answered her. "At least I'm a private detective. My name is Mike Shayne."

Even through the ankle he could feel her relax. "Why in hell didn't

you say so? I've heard of you. I thought you were tryin to rape me or something."

"I thought you were a man," Shayne explained.

He let go the ankle and grabbed a handful of wet slicker to make sure she didn't bolt back up the hatch. It wasn't really needed. She came on down into the cabin without further protest.

Shayne turned to the lamp but she stopped him. "Don't light it. This boat is being watched right now. In fact I thought you were one of them at first."

"Who are they and why watch this boat?"

"I don't know," she said. "At least I don't think I do. Where's old Pops anyway—sleeping it off again?"

"You could put it that way," Shayne said, "only this time it'll be the long sleep. He's in the police morgue."

She drew in her breath in a quick gasp.

"Oh my God," she said. "And they saw me come in here. Shayne, I'll never get out of here alive unless you help me."

The redhead was looking at her as best he could in the dim light which failed to show the color of hair or eyes. She was about five-eight and, as he'd reason to know, well muscled and firm fleshed. Her figure, even shrouded in the slicker, was big-hipped and high-breasted. It was her best point. The face

was oval with full lips and the left cheek crossed by the thin line of an old scar. She had on slacks and white shoes like the ones nurses or a waitress would wear. She was at least in her middle forties.

"Seen enough?" she asked suddenly.

"Who's out there," he asked in turn, "and what are you doing mixed up in this business?"

"I don't know exactly who they are," she said, "but they're sure as hell watching this here boat. I came out to warn old Pops I heard somebody was after him. He was good to me times when I needed it. Let me sleep on the boat here when I was short of cash, things like that. Then I seen them watching and I figured for sure I should tell him. Didn't know I was already too late."

"What's your name and where do you live?"

"Mary," she said, "Just Mary. I rent rooms here and there near where I work. I sling hash—that is when I can get a job. Say, are you going to help me get out of here in one piece? Or do you think we ought to spend the whole night here?"

"Under other circumstances that'd be a good idea," the big man said. "As it is we better get out before they decide to come in looking for us. You stick close to me, and if they jump us, cut and run for it. Wait for me down the street by the street light. Okay?"

"Okay," she said. "You tell 'em, buster."

Shayne hadn't been working that evening so he hadn't been wearing a gun. Now he felt naked without one. He scuffed around the cabin till he found a heavy pipe wrench and took that with him instead. When she saw what he was doing she armed herself with a claw hammer she found on the table.

They went out on deck together and then across the gang-plank to the river bank.

"They were in those bushes over to the left," she said in low tones, putting her lips close to his ear. "I think three men, maybe more."

Her hair smelled of perfume. Shayne didn't know why, but it somehow triggered his alarm radar. He didn't have time to think it out though. They were already crossing were already crossing the open space to the right of the bushes she'd pointed out.

It was a thick clump of shrubbery and try as he might he couldn't see into it. Rain was coming down hard. There could have been a dozen me hiding there. He let the big wrench swing loosely in his hand, ready to turn and go into action with lightning speed at the first sign of an attack.

Then a late car came down the street beyond and its headlights briefly swept the bushes. He couldn't see anyone at all lurking there. He started to turn, but it wasn't quite fast enough.

She swung full armed and laid the flat side of the hammer head hard against his temple. As he started to fall he heard her voice as if from a great distance.

"Sorry, lover," she said. "Good-by now."

Then the lights went out.

III

MIKE SHAYNE didn't come out of it for a good fifteen minutes. Apparently she hadn't wanted to kill or badly injure him, just put him out of action for a time. Otherwise she could have caved in his skull with the ball of that hammer. Still it had been a good crack. When he got to his feet it took a while to stop swaying and be sure he wouldn't go down again.

There was nothing more to do but accept the inevitable and go on home. He'd never find the woman in the rainy dark and he knew it.

"Suckered me in just like I was a rookie cop," he told himself disgustedly. "Just like I was a bright green pigeon. I wonder what she was really after on that boat."

At the moment there wasn't any way to find out. He went back to his apartment hotel, facing the bank of a much lower and more polite section of the river, mixed himself a hot toddy and fell into bed.

In the morning he stopped by his second floor office on Flagler Street for a talk with Lucy Hamilton. He found his beautiful secretary-as-

sistant typing up a routine report for one of his institutional clients.

"We've got us a real Missouri mule this time," Shayne told her, and went on to give her the details of the preceding night.

"Serves you right for believing anything that sort of woman tells you," Lucy remarked. "I suppose she could have used an axe and cut your head off though. Just as easily we should both be grateful she only wanted to knock you out."

"Gratitude be damned," Shayne said. "You always look on the bright side, Angel. I'm the one has a sore head and a punctured professional ego. She made a fool of me."

"If you see her, thank her for me." Lucy Hamilton laughed. "If you weren't out-foxed once in a while you'd get impossibly conceited. Seriously, Michael, what do you think she has to do with the case?"

"I wish I knew," he said. "I wish I knew what anybody had to do with it."

"No. Seriously, what's your guess about the woman?"

"Seriously," he said, "I haven't an idea. She could have come to kill Willy herself or to warn him. She could have been looking for something to take off the boat—or bringing something else to put aboard. As far as I'm concerned, we can toss a coin to find out which."

"What are you going to do this morning?"

"First I'm going to talk to the

Ace Import-Export people. That's the logical step. Then I'm going to look for that broad and try to find out what her game is."

"What can I do to help?"

"Give Will Gentry a ring and tell him I'll be in and out of Willy's boat and for him to tell his men it's okay. Don't mention the woman to him. Then call Tim Rourke at the *News* and let him tap his own grapevines. After that you might start calling hashhouses along that stretch of river and see if you can locate a waitress fitting that one's description. There shouldn't be more than thirty or forty to check."

"Yes master," she laughed. "And in my spare time?"

Shayne bent over the beautiful woman where she sat and kissed her warmly on the mouth.

"In your spare time, Angel," he said, "think about that."

He left the office before she could come up with a rejoinder, and walked over to the Ace company's offices in the former Chamber of Commerce Building near Biscayne Boulevard. The office he wanted was on the fourth floor.

A dark haired, mini-skirted receptionist told him Mr. Gonzalez would see him shortly and then neglected her typing to make eyes at the big man across her desk.

Mr. Roberto Gonzalez was as dark, sleek and expensive looking as his secretary-receptionist. So was his inner office, which had been recently panelled in Honduras



mahogany, and the furniture upholstered in what could have been genuine leopard skin. There was an antiqued Spanish bronze desk set and framed oil paintings of three schooners.

"I'll get right to the point," Shayne said. "I represent Trans-World Insurance Company."

"We've got all the insurance we need," Gonzalez said.

"It's not exactly that I'm here about. Your firm recently took out a life policy on a man called William Francis Burk. Do you remember the transaction?"

Gonzalez gave him a level and apparently perfectly candid look.

"No," he said. "I do not know of any such policy. You must be mistaken, Mr. Shayne."

"I might be, but my company isn't," Shayne said in surprise. "Particularly in this case. The policy was a large one—fifty thousand dollars with a double indemnity."

clause. That's a lot of money for you not to know about. Don't you agree?"

It was Gonzalez' turn to look startled. "I most certainly do agree. We have a group insurance policy with another company, but that is absolutely all. We don't insure even our officers by separate and special policies. Even if we did, anything in that large an amount would have to come across my own desk, and I never sign anything without reading it. Besides I never heard of your Mr. Burk. Hold on a minute."

He picked his desk phone out of its cradle and made several calls, speaking a rapid Spanish that Shayne couldn't follow. After the last call he leaned back.

"There's something very strange indeed here," he told the detective. "I've just talked to our sales manager, our accountant and our attorney. None of them know anything at all about such a policy. There's no record of any premium payment being made by us and like myself they know nothing about a Mr. Burk. Your firm must have misinformed you."

"Not a chance," Shayne said. "That outfit never makes a mistake about any amount of cash bigger than a nickel. Tell you what. Let me have that phone and I'll call their local agency and let you talk to the manager yourself."

Shayne suited the word to the deed, contacted Brooks Robinson

and passed the phone to the export-import executive.

"Something is indeed terribly wrong," Gonzalez said after the call. "Mr. Robinson assures me that there is such a policy, and my firm is named as beneficiary. The whole affair was handled by mail, on our letterhead over my name. The premium was paid in cash that was delivered by a messenger. The only actual person they saw besides the messenger was Mr. Burk himself, and that only when one of their sales people had to go find him and persuade him to take a medical exam. His age and habits and health were such that there was a very high premium. It was paid without question."

"You're telling me, then, that this whole business could have been done in the name of your firm without you knowing about it at all?"

"If someone were crazy enough to want to do it that way, yes," Gonzalez said, "Apparently there was someone just that crazy. Who is this Burk? Why don't you question him?"

"I can't," Shayne said. "Willy Burk can't talk. He was murdered last night."

"Murdered. *Madre Dios!* No wonder you are here."

"That's right," the big man said. "No wonder I'm here. There'll be more coming after me too. Police and insurance lawyers and for all I know the F.B.I. and the C.I.A.

This one's going to make waves like a gold strike. You can believe me when I say you're going to have to prove everything you've told me."

"The operations of our firm are an open book," the man behind the desk said. He didn't quite look to Shayne's experienced and cynical eye as if he meant it. "You said you were a private detective, Mr. Shayne?"

For reply the big man gave him a business card.

"Exactly. Yes indeed." Gonzalez was reading the card. I suppose you realize perfectly well that your investigation of this business could turn out to be embarrassing to my firm. Yes. I'm not worried about you finding that we killed this old man, because we didn't. However extended publicity would tend to reflect on our public image, and through no fault of our own. So I'd like to give you a chance to do us both a good turn."

"I work for Trans World," Shayne said.

"Of course you do. I'm not asking you to betray your first employer in any way at all. This is what I propose. I want this business cleared up as fast as possible, so I'll give you this incentive. If you find the killer by noon tomorrow, I'll pay you a bonus or reward—call it what you will of five thousand dollars. If in the next twenty-four hours after that, four thousand, and so on till the fifth day. After that no bonus."

"That sounds okay," Shayne

said, "but suppose it turns out to be one of your own people? Do you still pay?"

"Of course I do. In fairness though I'm going to make the same offer to the police. I expect they'll be here shortly."

"I expect they will," Shayne said. "All right then. Just one more question. If Trans World decide they have to pay off on the policy, will you accept the money?"

Gonzalez smiled the smile of one man of the world to another. "Of course I won't refuse a hundred thousand dollars. No business man would."

"Refusing that cash," Shayne pointed out, "would strengthen the presumption of your innocence." He was watching Gonzalez closely for a reaction to the statement.

It came fast enough. "That presumption doesn't need any more strength than the fact that I am innocent. Now, Mr. Shayne, I do have business for this morning."

Shayne accepted dismissal. "Sure you do. Only you better tell your people I'll be looking around and to cooperate. It'll make things easier for me and them."

He got a written pass from Gonzalez and the address of the firm's warehouse and sales office.

On his way out the receptionist gave him a dazzling smile.

"Don't I know you from someplace?" he asked.

"Oh no, Mr. Shayne," she said, "but we don't have to play that

game." She handed him a card on which she'd written the name Nita and a phone number. "I'm really a big girl, and I'd just love to see your etchings. Just call that number any time—and if a man answers it's my step-father."

She smiled at him again.

Shayne put the card in his pocket. He wasn't fooling with her, he thought waiting for the elevator. He'd met that girl somewhere before—that or she reminded him of someone he knew. Then he shrugged it off. At his time of life he was always meeting people who reminded him of someone else.

He phoned his office from the pay booth in the lobby.

"I'm glad you called," Lucy said. "Michael, Will Gentry wants you to call him right away. I haven't managed to reach Tim yet, but I'll keep on trying."

"Fine. Any clue to the mystery woman?"

"Not yet," she said. "Of course it would help if you knew the color of her hair and eyes. Every eatery I call knows a couple of people who fit the general description. You'd be amazed at how many egg-jockeys have cuts someplace about the face too. You honestly would. I don't know whether they cut each other up or just go with Mack the Knife, but it's about as common as warts and a lot more so than freckles."

"Okay. I get your point: I wish I could help you out, Angel. It's just

that I never learned to see eye and hair color in the dark."

"What are you going to do next?"

"Call Will Gentry, and then go take a look around the Ace Company warehouse on the river. I'd like to know what it really is they import and export. Anyway it's the best I can think of at the moment."

Shayne hung up and dialed Gentry's unlisted office phone. The Chief took the call in person.

"What are you up to now, Mike?"

"You know all about it," Shayne said. "I told your boy Milliken last night. There's a screwy insurance tie-in with the Willy Burk killing. I've just been following up on that. It's a real puzzler."

"It could get to be a lot more than a puzzler," the Chief said. "I don't know whose feet you're stepping on this time, but it must be somebody big. We've had three separate tips since four this morning from stoolies that there's a city-wide contract out on you. Somebody's offering twenty grand to hit you, Mike. Wide open offer to any taker. That's a lot of money for your head, boy."

"It's too much," Shayne said. "I don't believe it. Nobody wants me dead that badly."

"Correction," Gentry said. "Somebody does. These are reliable pigeons. They know better than to lie to me. I was just hoping you could give us an idea who is back of it."

"I can't," Shayne said. "If it's

true, I wish I could, but I don't think it's true. Just a blow-up of a rumor. If your sources were reliable, they wouldn't be stoolies and you know it."

"I know I believe them. I'm telling you, Mike, get off this case. Get out of town and let my boys take over."

"You know I can't do that, Will."

"I know you'd better do like I say. Take Lucy to Jamaica. Go fishing. You don't do like I say and I'll put out an A.P.B. on you myself and lock you up for spitting on the sidewalk. At least that way I'd know you were safe."

"I'll let you know what I decide," Shayne said.

He hung up without waiting for a reply. He appreciated his old friend's concern, but had no intention of leaving the case, particularly not in view of the bonus Gonzalez had offered. At the same time he resolved to stay armed and alert. Even the rumor of a twenty-thousand dollar price on his head would be enough to tempt some greedy fellow citizens. One of them might try for the jackpot at any time.

IV

MIKE SHAYNE got into his car and drove out to the Ace Company warehouse on Northwest South River Drive. It was on the river bank and had a long wooden wharf running its full length. A rusty iron tramp steamer was tied to the wharf

and black cargo handlers were carrying crates through the big sliding doors.

Except for Gonzalez' own executive suite all the Ace offices were at this one location. A secretary told Shayne the salesmen had already gone out on their calls for the day, and directed him to the warehouse to find the manager.

It was a Mr. Jake Kahn in shirt sleeves with a blue stubble over one of the hardest chins the big detective had ever seen.

"Mister G. phoned you'd likely be sticking your snoot in here," Kahn said truculently and spat on the floor an inch from Shayne's foot. "He said make you to home, but I'm a busy man. Them dock hands ain't worth cat's meat less I watch them close. Steal the eyes right out of your head given half a chance."

"That's okay," Shayne said. "I'll just take a look round by myself. Exactly what does this outfit deal in anyway?"

"What?" Kahn snorted. "That's a good one. Every unprintable sort of unmentionable muck those gooks down in the islands and Central America use or produce. We bring in tough beef from Nicaragua, logs from Honduras, rum and carved canes from Haiti and hides from Domenica, not to mention junk I wouldn't use to wipe mud off a dog."

"For the trip back we send 'em everything from electric washing machines to toothpaste, air condi-

tioners to hair tonic and dirty magazines. Anything some merchant down there thinks he can unload for ten times its real worth."

"Ever have trouble with the crews trying to smuggle stuff in?" Shayne asked.

Kahn spat again. "Trouble? Hell, no. If they do or don't, I dunno and I don't want to. So long as what goes into this shed checks with my tally list, that's exactly all that's my business. Let Uncle Sam collect his own tariffs. I couldn't care less, and you can bet on that."

"Okay," Shayne said. "Just thought I'd ask."

"Well, I told you. One more thing, mister private crime war, nobody here had nothing to do with knocking off that old bum down-river. You ask me, it was good ridance anyway."

"I didn't ask you," Shayne said.

Shayne took a quick turn around the warehouse. Most of the contents were crated or baled. He could decipher some of the labels in English, Spanish or creole French, but had no way of telling if the contents matched. Other things like bundles of bloody, salted Cayman hides identified themselves all too definitely via his nose.

There could have been all sorts of smuggled goods about. He wouldn't have any way of telling. On the other hand if smuggling actually was going on, he couldn't see any logical connection with Willy Burk. Unlike many of the boats

used as homes along the river, Burk's was in seaworthy condition and actually put out of the Bay on short cruises. It wasn't an island trader though by any stretch of the imagination.

Mike Shayne went aboard the rusty tramp at the dock. It sported the unlikely name of *El Pero Negro*—Black Dog—and appeared to be in the last stages of rusted out decrepitude. The deck was gritty with rust flakes and slippery with greasy dirt all at the same time. A bored mate looked down at him from the bridge but made no attempt to interfere or question the big man.

He stuck his head through the door to the crew's quarters, and pulled it back out hastily. The smell was something that had to be experienced to believe.

Next he climbed down a companion ladder to the hold from which the crew were now unloading burlap wrapped bales of something or other. Aside from more bales and a stack of hands of bananas, there was nothing of interest there.

Forward of the hatch was a compartment mostly filled with rusty anchor chain. He didn't go in.

Shayne walked aft and opened a door leading into the section of after-hold. There were stacks of bales and boxes piled in there with aisles between. On impulse he stepped inside, leaving the door open behind him for light. Something rustled and scrambled back off of the cargo off to

his right. He figured it must be a rat, and stepped further into the aisle.

The door closed behind him and all light was cut off. At the same time he heard breathing and the almost inaudible sussuration of bare feet on the metal deck behind him. Somebody had stepped into the hold and closed the door from inside, not outside.

Mike Shaynes reflexes were honed fine by years of meeting and dealing with emergencies. He started to whirl round and reach for his belt-holstered gun in a single fluid motion.

He got round, but before he could brace himself or get the gun out his attacker was on him. A round-house swing in the dark glanced off the side of the detective's face, jarred him back so that he would have fallen if there hadn't been packing cases at his back, and caused him to drop the gun. Before he could stoop and grope for it two hands that felt as big as baseball catcher's gloves clamped round his throat.

In a first quick reaction Shayne slugged at the form in front of him. His hands struck naked flesh, oak-hard and greased with oily sweat. The hands on his throat tightened and cut off every bit of breath. A body bigger than this own pressed him backwards.

Shayne struck into the man's belly with both fists and at the same time flung himself back away from



contact. He needed air and room and began to be concerned the huge hands would break his neck. He clasped his hands, spread his elbows and punched upward between his face and the assailant's in the classic judo counter to a throat hold.

Shayne was a strong man. One of the fellow's hands was torn loose from about his neck. To his consternation, the other one kept its grip, and he felt his own wrists seized by the free hand. For the first time in years Miwe Shayne wondered if he was up against a fighter he couldn't handle.

Then he remembered the sound

of bare feet on the deck. He raised his right leg as far as he could bend the knee and slammed it down on his opponent's bare feet. The heavy leather heel stomped flesh and he felt bones crumble in the arch of a big foot.

That did it. The other yelled out in pain and let go. Shayne dropped to his knees and groped in the dark for his gun. Just as his fingers closed on the cold steel a violent blow in the face sent him tumbling backwards in the dirty cargo aisle. He could hear the other man stumbling and groping about.

Then the door opened and a dark figure, so big it just about filled the space and blotted out the light, darted through into the main hold.

Shayne might have fired, but he was still partially stunned and groggy. His chest was heaving as he pulled in long draughts of air and the hand that held the gun wasn't quite steady yet.

Then the door slammed shut again and he'd lost his chance.

He got to his feet, swallowing painfully and beginning to ache all over, and felt for broken bones. There weren't any. He checked his gun, put it into the waistband of his trousers where he could reach it easily, and started to go out of there.

Somewhat to his surprise the door to the after hold wasn't locked. But by the time he got out whoever had jumped him was out of sight. The black crewmen went on unloading

cargo with an innocent air and a studied avoidance of his eyes that convinced the detective they knew perfectly well what had happened but that he'd get no information whatever from them.

Instead of wasting time with futile questions he concentrated on tracking his man by the blood from his broken foot. One or more small bones must have cut through the skin after breaking, for there was a trail of red drops, rapidly turning brown in the open air. It led right through the line of burdened blacks to the companion ladder going up to the bridge. Shayne followed.

He barely got to the ladder when an old man in a filthy, gold braided peaked cap came and yelled down at him in Spanish.

"I'm coming up," Shayne yelled.

The captain, if that was who it was, continued to yell at him and gesture that he was to stay where he was. At the sound of the commotion Jake Kahn came out on the dock.

"He says to get off his ship," he yelled to Shayne."

"You tell him to forget it," Shayne yelled. "One of his people just tried to kill me and I'm going to yank the man off that bridge and make a citizen's arrest."

"No you aren't," Kahn said. He and the captain exchanged rapid fire Spanish. Mike Shayne could follow part of it but not all.

"He says," Kahn informed him, "that you're crazy. Nobody bothered

you. He also says get off his ship. Even if it was American registry, which it isn't, you'd need a warrant to search the bridge. As it is, if you try to force your way up there, he can shoot you or call the cops himself and charge you with piracy. The charge will stick in a Federal court too."

"Thanks," Shayne said wryly. "You've been a big help."

"Always glad to help a friend of the boss," Kahn said, and spat into the filthy brown river water. "Now get yourself down off that craft before he does like he said."

Mike Shayne knew when he'd been headed off at the pass. He climbed back onto the dock. As he went up the gangplank a crewman who'd just carried off a hand of bananas turned and laughed in his face:

Shayne hit the man so hard his front teeth splintered and he went down and out like a light. Then the redhead walked on out to the street, still fuming with rage. He'd had a narrow escape and knew it—and a man powerful enough to handle him with ease was still at large and dangerous.

V

LUCY HAMILTON was at her desk when Mike Shayne got back to his office. She looked up quickly as he came in the door. "Oh, thank heaven you're back, Michael." She held out an envelope. "I've been trying to

find you. This came by messenger half an hour ago. It was unsealed, so I read it."

He took a single sheet of paper out of the envelope. The message was neatly typed and the meaning perfectly plain.

"Mr Shayne," it read. *"Last night there really weren't any men in the bushes. Tonight there will be. They're looking for you and they'll be back of every bush and up every alley you pass. Sooner or later they'll get you, Shayne. You were decent to me last night, so I'm warning you. Get off the case you are working on. Get out of town for a while. This warning makes us all even. If you see me again, I owe you nothing."*

There was no signature.

"This is from the woman I saw last night on the boat," he told Lucy. "Who did you say brought it?"

"One of the regular messengers from Inter-City Deliveries," she said. "I've already called them. They don't know who sent it to you. Somebody dropped it off and paid cash for the delivery. What on earth is going on, Michael?"

"I wish I knew, Angel," he said.

"You've been in a fight. You've been bruised," she said. "Is Will Gentry right that your life is in danger?"

"You might say that," he said. "Half an hour ago King Kong or his big brother was trying to choke me in the hold of a tramp steamer. What next?"

They didn't have to wait long to

find out the answer to that question.

The door from the hall opened and two men came into the office. They barely got past the door before both of them drew guns.

The big one, the one with the blue forty-five automatic, spoke first. "Somebody wants to see you right now, Shayne."

Lucy Hamilton jumped out of her chair and grabbed Shayne around the waist.

"Michael," she said. "Darling, I won't let them hurt you."

He felt her left hand pull the gun out of his belt and shove it into the big, soft leather bag which hung from her shoulder by a wide strap.

"Stand clear of him, sister," the big one said. "Me, I'd sooner kill the pair of you than spit, but the boss wants to talk, so behave yourselves and you'll be okay."

"He'll kill you if he has to," the rat-faced little man said. He had a nickel plated little Smith and Wesson hammerless, grip safety revolver in 32 caliber and he waved it like a baton. "Roy likes to kill people. He sure does, and I like to watch. Try something. I dare you."

"Why don't you shut up and let him do his own talking?" Shayne asked. To the big one: "Let the young lady go, buster, and I'll come quietly. I give you my word."

"Save it," the man said. "You'll come along anyway, and I'm taking her too to make sure you do stay quiet. One wrong move out of you and Bobby here shoots your sweetie-

pie in the gut. Where she'll die hard and take a long time about it. Bobby's real good at shooting dames in the gut. Ain't you, Bobby?"

The little man gave a crazy giggle.

"The boss says everybody should have a specialty," Roy said. "Bobby's is gut-shooting dames. He's a real killer, that boy is."

"You bother her, Bobby," Shayne said, "and I'll pull off your arms with my bare hands and stuff them down your throat."

He sounded like he meant it, which he did. Bobby took two quick steps backwards.

"I like a tough boy," Roy said, "but only on my side. You're wasting time, Shayne. We got places to go. Come on—and remember what happens to Miss Baby Doll here if Bobby gets nervous."

They marched. Downstairs a closed, air conditioned car was parked at the curb. Roy drove and Shayne and Lucy had to sit in the front seat with him. Bobby sat in the back seat with that nasty little gun in his hand. He could carry out his threat, or kill Shayne instead, anytime he felt like it. With the car windows shut and the air conditioner going chances were nobody'd even hear the shot over normal traffic noises.

Just before they left the office Roy had frisked Mike Shayne deftly and expertly. He took the big man's handcuffs and pocket knife and dropped them in the waste basket. He seemed surprised not to find a

gun, but made no move to search Lucy Hamilton. She wasn't supposed to be armed.

Shayne spoke to the big man who was driving. "You're making a mistake to force Miss Hamilton to come along. Let her out of the car, and I'll cooperate with your boss as far as I can."

Roy seemed to think it over.

"I think you might," he said, "but it ain't my decision. I got orders to bring her along so you will behave yourself."

Shayne didn't try again.

The car went over to Biscayne Boulevard and then turned north as part of an almost solid stream of traffic. Roy was a good driver. He kept going smoothly even if not very fast.

They kept on north of 79th Street and the entrances to the Broad and 163rd Street Causeways and finally turned into the parking lot behind a ramshackle building that housed a bar and girlie show.

Shayne had seen the place many times. He was bothered that no effort had been made to blindfold him or Lucy. He was afraid it meant they weren't going to be released to report to anyone else. He made up his mind to fight his way out of this the instant he could see a chance to get Lucy safely away.

There wasn't any chance in the parking lot. Besides the two hoods in the car another man came out with a shotgun and watched from a little distance.



LUCY HAMILTON

They all went in the back door and found themselves in a long hallway with peeling paint on the walls and a worn strip of what might once have been called carpet under foot. A long dressing room opened off one side and he had a glimpse of half a dozen tired looking women putting on makeup inside for the show in the bar.

Roy led the way into an office in the back of the building and Bobby trailed along behind waving his little gun. Inside the office they were told to sit down in two plain wooden chairs facing the desk. Roy

and Bobby stood against the wall at their backs.

Lucy sat at Shayne's right. Her big handbag hung on her left side, suspended from the left shoulder. Shayne could reach into it and get his hand on his gun in a second, if he decided to make a fight. For the moment he waited to see what would happen next.

The hall door opened and someone came into the room with the clicking step of a woman wearing high heels. Shayne did not turn his head.

The woman who had called herself Mary the night before walked past him and sat down at the desk. Her face showed no recognition, so he kept his own impassive. Lucy Hamilton had never seen the woman before.

"Mr. Shayne," the woman said in crisp tones quite unlike the slurring intonations of their previous talk, "I'm sorry to have had you brought here the way I did. I just wanted to be sure you'd come. Miss Hamilton was brought to guarantee your good behavior."

One of Shayne's big hands went up and the thumb and index finger tugged at his ear lobe. It was a mannerism that meant he was thinking hard.

"Just what is this all about?" Lucy Hamilton asked. "What are you planning to do with us?"

Shayne was looking the woman over carefully. This was certainly no blowsy, middle aged hash-slinger.

Today she wore a plain but expensive fitted linen suit in dark blue. There was a strand of very good pearls about her throat and a big Columbian emerald ring on her left hand. She looked cool, crisp and confident after a decidedly executive fashion.

"What I really want to do," she said, "is to help you. Accident has involved you, Mr. Shayne, in a situation that is potentially very dangerous. The smart thing for you would be to drop all further connection with the case you are investigating. I don't suppose I could persuade you to agree?"

"That's right," Shayne told her. "Once I start a case, I finish it. They call it professional ethics."

"I was afraid of that," she said. "Of course I could keep the lovely Miss Hamilton with me to guarantee your good behavior. Some of my associates have already suggested that I do."

"I wouldn't recommend it," Shayne said positively.

"I was sure you wouldn't," she said cheerfully. "For a man in your business, you've got a remarkably well-developed bump of chivalry. I've no wish to have you launch a personal feud against me. Life is quite complicated enough as it is. So I'm going to take a more unusual course. I'm going to tell you what you want to know."

"That will be interesting," Shayne said.

"In the first place," she said, as

if he hadn't spoken, "I don't know who actually put the knife into the old man on the river, but I can say who ordered it done and why. He was killed by order of Mr. Gonzalez of Ace Import-Export. It was done to keep him from betraying secrets which Ace felt must at any cost be suppressed."

"Such as?" the detective asked.

"Such as the fact that Burk had been working with Ace at the very dangerous trade of gun-running—to one country, my own, in particular. Gonzalez and I both come originally from the same small Central American Republic. Mr. G is part of an opposition which is trying to prepare for revolution.

"He knew that shipments of guns couldn't be made from his regular warehouse. It's too closely watched by your people and ours. So he got the idea of hiring old Burk. The guns would be loaded into Burk's boat in the dark of night. When a ship left for our port after loading at the Ace dock, Burk would meet that ship a few miles off-shore and transfer the guns where the transaction wouldn't be observed."

"That's all very well," Shayne said, "but how do I know it's true?"

"Very easily," she said. "Get your friends on the police force, or your Customs people or F.B.I., to search the boat. Right now there are three cases of submachine guns and two hundred thousand rounds of ammunition. Your people will be able to trace the sale of these arms to a

representative of Ace. When you leave here you can go yourself and make certain I'm not lying."

"So," the big redhead said, "they have a nice, fool-proof racket set up. Okay. Now why do they want to ruin the whole thing by killing their boy Willy? Also why point right to him with a big insurance policy just before the knifing? To me it's those two things that don't make sense."

The more he looked at "Mary," the more certain Shayne was that her face was familiar. He'd known her before, he was sure, but he couldn't quite place the occasion.

"Try and explain those points," the big detective finished.

"I'll do more than try," she said. "I said I'd tell you the truth, and I will. When the insurance was taken out they didn't know they were going to have to kill the old man. He was still a valuable part of their operation. What they really insured wasn't so much his life as his role as a money making factor. The gun running was very profitable, but guns are expensive and aren't paid for to the runner until they're delivered. If anything happened to Willy, they wanted to recover."

"Then Willy got too greedy for his own good. Maybe the insurance gave him ideas. He demanded they double his cut. When they wouldn't do it right off he went to our Miami consulate and offered to sell what he knew. That's how my friends and I found out what I've just been tell-

ing you. The Ace people must have guessed or discovered what he was up to. So they had him killed. It wasn't hard, I'm sure, to hire somebody for the job."

"I follow you so far," Shayne said. "Their big mistake was not realizing the insurance company wouldn't pay off on a policy that size without an investigation. No policy and the police would have had only a routine waterfront killing about which nobody'd really care."

"Precisely, Mr. Shayne. They even made sure nobody could prove who placed the policy. It wasn't enough. Here you were, and with a reputation that made them worried as to how much you'd find out. So the first thing they thought of was to have you killed too. That wasn't as easy as doing away with the old man. One of their people tried already on the ship but here you are. Of course they have a big price on your head. Many evil men will want to collect it. Sooner or later someone will unless you bring Gonzalez to justice first.

"I don't want you killed, Mike Shayne. What I want is to see Gonzalez arrested and his gun running broken up before it can arm a revolutionary army against my government. That's why I had you brought here so I could tell you the truth. When I leave these men will take you back downtown. Go to your own police with everything I've told you. Finish this case and save your own life at the same time. Earn the

big bonus Gonzalez promised you by getting him indicted for his own crime.

"One more thing. I borrowed this office from a friend. It will do you no good to come back here looking for me. Now I must go, and I won't see this place again. Just remember that everything I've told you is the truth. Check it out for yourself."

"I'll do that," the detective said. "You wouldn't want to give me your real name, I suppose?"

She didn't even bother to answer that, just got up from the desk chair and walked to the door with that same decisive clicking of heels.

When the door had closed behind her Roy motioned to them to get up and follow him. He led the way to the door, and Bobby brought up the rear again.

The little man made the mistake of poking Shayne over the kidney with his thirty-eight.

"Get moving," he said.

Shayne pivoted slightly to his right. His right hand reached back and got a grip on Bobby's forearm and twisted like a vise till one of the bones snapped.

He stepped back and aside and propelled the little hood forward till he crashed into Roy's back. The gun fell from the hand of his broken arm.

Shayne took a long step forward, reached over the screaming Bobby and chopped the heel of his hand at the base of Roy's neck. Big as

he was, Roy was knocked unconscious.

Bobby tried to reach the gun with his left hand and Shayne stepped on his fingers where they scrabbled on the floor. Bobby screamed again and fainted.

The man with the shotgun was right by the rear door. He wasn't expecting Shayne to come out first, and that cost him the round. The big redhead yanked the shotgun out of his hands and bent the barrels over his head.

Then he went over to the car in which Roy had driven them uptown. The key was still right where Roy had left it in the lock. Lucy Hamilton got in the front seat beside him, and he started the motor.

"Why did you do that?" Lucy asked. "They were going to let us go anyway."

"I just wanted to make sure they didn't change their minds."

VI

MIKE SHAYNE didn't drive all the way back to his office. Instead he left the car on Biscayne Boulevard in the northeast twenties, threw the key down a convenient storm drain grating and walked the couple of blocks to Lucy Hamilton's apartment.

When they were in her living room she got him a bottle of his favorite brandy and a pitcher of cold water from the refrigerator. He poured himself a stiff three fingers



and took it down with one swallow, followed by some water. The warmth of it felt good in his stomach, and he sat quietly, letting it burn.

All this time Lucy had kept quiet. Woman-wise, she washed her face and put on fresh makeup. Only after she knew the brandy had had time to settle did she try to speak.

"What did you make of all that?" she asked then.

"You're a smart girl, Angel," Shayne said. "Suppose you tell me what you made of it."

He reached for the bottle and poured another three fingers of brandy into the tumbler, but didn't drink any of it at first. He stretched out his legs and relaxed in the comfortable chair. Only then did Lucy speak.

"A lot of what that woman said

sounded true," she began. "She was the woman you saw last night, wasn't she?"

Shayne nodded.

"I guessed that," Lucy said. "There wasn't any scar on her face, but her makeup would hide that. Yes, a lot of it sounded true, but I'm not at all sure that it was. The whole story seemed to hang together, but then again it just wasn't right. If you know what I mean, there was just something unreal about it."

She stopped and seemed to be thinking about it and then lit a cigarette before continuing. "She just said so much and explained everything so neatly. I found myself not believing her without having any good reason not to."

"That's right," Shayne said. "She knew too much. Nobody knows all about a case like this till it's finished; I think the part about Willy running guns was true. She wouldn't have told me I'd find guns in the hold of his boat unless she was dead sure I would find them."

"What else, Michael?"

"She knew too much, Angel. She just plain knew too much for me to credit. How did she know all about my being attacked in the hold of that ship? I hadn't had time yet to tell you all of that story, let alone for it to get all over town. How did she know about Gonzalez offering me a bonus? I thought nobody knew that but him and me. Of course the one thing I really wanted was the one

she said she didn't know. That was the name of the shiv man who actually cut Willy. If I had him, he could be made to tell who hired him."

"Do you think she really knew that and just wouldn't tell you?" Lucy Hamilton asked.

"Right now I'm not sure what I do know and what I don't," he said. "Maybe she did the knifing herself. Maybe Roy and Bobby did it. It's the sort of thing that little creep would go for, I think. Maybe she really doesn't know. How can I tell?"

"I'll fix you some lunch and you'll feel better," Lucy said more practically. "A hot bowl of bean and bacon soup and a cold roast beef sandwich. How will that be?"

"Put the sandwich on rye and it'll be just fine. I've got to think. In all that talk there was one thing that I knew when she said it was wrong. Now it's gone out of my mind, but I know I have to remember. I have to remember what it was and why it was wrong and then try to figure out why she said it. One of these days," he said disgustedly, "I'm likely to go out and forget to wear my head. Do you think I'm getting old, Angel?"

"As far as I'm concerned, you're getting younger every day," she said and leaned over to kiss him. He pulled her down into his lap and kissed her hard on the lips.

"You see?" she said. "That's just exactly what makes me say you get

younger. Now let me fix that lunch for you, silly." She got off his lap and went into the apartment kitchen.

The phone rang, and Shayne picked it up and said: "Hello?"

"So that's where you are, you big overstuffed baboon." It was Will Gentry's voice. "I wonder if you know a big black man checked into the Jackson Hospital Clinic an hour ago with his right foot all busted out of shape?"

"What makes you think I'd care?" Shayne said.

"I figured you'd care because some nice anonymous pal of yours called the desk and told us to pick him up and ask him where you were. Sort of hinted the answer might be you were in the river."

"I'm not," Shayne said.

"Of course you aren't. The phone service isn't any good in all that mud. A squad car picked up the man for me. Big as he is I'd have had to send the riot platoon, if he'd wanted to make a fight of it. He came along all right, but he isn't talking."

"Reason with him," Shayne said. "Just explain calmly what it is you want to know. And good luck."

"I'd like to reason with you with a night stick," Will Gentry said. "Did you or did you not break his foot? And why?"

"He'll tell you," Shayne said. "Just you reason with him like I said. And take your time. I admit I feel better with him in a nice safe

place. Look, are you staking out Willy's boat?"

"No," the Chief said. "Can you give me a reason why I ought to?"

"I'd rather give you reasons not to," Shayne said. "I just wanted to know because I left something there last night and I'm going by later to look for it."

"I suppose that's okay. You want I should send a man over with the key to let you aboard?"

"I won't need it. I've keys will open a lock that old." Shayne tried to sound casual. He hung up the phone and sat tugging at his ear while Lucy finished heating the soup. A plan was beginning to form in his head.

The hot food made Shayne feel better. He considered another brandy but rejected the idea. This was no time to get even a little muddled.

He told Lucy to stay where she was and let nobody in that she didn't recognize. Then he took a bus down to Flagler Street, got his car out of the garage and drove to a boat repair marina near the mouth of the river.

The owner rented him a sixteen foot clinker built skiff and a ten horsepower outboard motor. Shayne started the motor and headed the little boat's prow upstream towards where old Willy Burk's boat was tied to the piling.

Arrived at the boat, he tied up his outboard to the stern and clambered over the rail. The hatches were secured, but the deckhouse lock yielded readily to one of his

master keys. He opened up and went on into the wheelhouse and down the ladder to the main cabin.

Now that he had something to look for, and by daylight, the detective saw tell-tale signs of unwanted prosperity on the dead owner's part.

The bottles of whiskey on the locker shelves were all expensive brands. There were prime steaks in the freezer, and lobster tails. The canned food was of expensive brands. Hanging from a hook near the berth was an expensive blue flannel blazer and on the floor beside the berth a pair of seventy-five-dollar alligator shoes.

Shayne figured there'd probably also be a tin box of money hid out someplace. Old Willy Burk wouldn't be the sort to trust a bank with his ill-gotten gains. Shayne tried to think where he'd put it if he was the old man. Then he found the box itself, stuffed into the compartment that housed the pipes for toilet and shower.

It was full of money which Shayne didn't want. He estimated a couple of thousand dollars at the least. What he did want were papers, notes, a diary—anything that would establish what Willy Burk had been up to and particularly who he'd been working for. He found nothing of the sort.

That was a real disappointment. Shayne was sure some sort of revealing papers were hidden on the boat, if only because the old man wouldn't

overlook the possibility of a profitable future career of blackmail. His type never did.

There wouldn't be time for a really extended search through the heaps and piles of assorted junk which filled the cabins.

"First things first," he reminded himself, and began to explore the small cargo hold.

He found what he wanted there without any trouble. There were three large cases of wood, nailed shut and marked "Agricultural Tools" in a black stencil.

When he used a crowbar to pry loose a board on one of the cases, Shayne found it was filled with old World War Two vintage British Bren guns smeared with cosmoline and wrapped individually in brown paper. There were other boxes which he was sure held ammunition, but he was only interested in the guns themselves.

With considerable difficulty—the cases were heavy and awkward for a man to handle—he got the guns up on deck. There he rove a block and tackle, made a rope sling, and got the cases of guns overside into his outboard skiff. Their weight added to his own brought the gunwale down within a couple of inches of the water.

For a minute he considered getting aboard again and searching for Willy Burk's papers. Then he discarded the idea for the second time in an hour.

Shayne was sure he'd been

vatched ever since he'd tied the kiff to the larger boat's stern. He'd have been badly disturbed if he hadn't been observed, as it was an essential part of his plan that he hould be. On the other hand he didn't want to give the watcher time o get help and come after him there on the boat.

He cast off the skiff's painter, got the outboard started on the third try and went back downstream the way he'd come. On the open river here wasn't any way to hide, and he didn't really care about that in any case. He did care about hitting drifting debris or being swamped by a passing yacht or tug-towed barge.

Shayne was carrying valuable cargo in his little skiff. He figured at least twenty guns in each case. There might be more, but he reckoned on the basis of twenty. Even as old as they were each of the twenty would bring a minimum of two-hundred-and-fifty dollars in gold or American paper on delivery to a Ceneral American beach.

That meant five thousand dollars a case absolute minimum. More if the buyer was desperate and the seller greedy enough. A high wave or a floating log could tip the skiff and put all fifteen thousand dollars into the ten feet of muddy slime and sewage solids that composed the river bottom along this particular stretch. It would be a major operation to salvage anything heavy that fell in there. That is of course if it could be done at all.

At the marina where he'd rented the skiff, Shayne made a phone call that brought an unmarked panel truck from a car rental agency. He loaded the cases of guns aboard with the aid of the agency driver and gave the man money to take a cab back to his place of business.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE spent the next hour twisting and turning about the city until he was absolutely sure nobody was tailing him. He finally left the truck in one of the largest and most expensive of the city's downtown parking garages. This one was open and guarded all night.

From the garage Shayne walked to one of his favorite restaurants for a hearty dinner and then reclaimed his car from outside the marina and drove it do its regular overnight parking spot back of his hotel.

When he entered the lobby the clerk held up a finger to attract his attention.

"Somebody's been trying to get you on the phone, Mr. Shayne," he said. "He must have called half a dozen times. Won't leave any name. Chief Gentry called too and says get ahold of him as soon as you come in."

"Thanks, Pete," Shayne said. "I'll do that. If the other guy calls again, put him right through. I've been expecting him."

Upstairs in his own apartment the big man got a bottle of old French

brandy out of the kitchen and poured some into a glass tumbler. He drank a swallow, lit himself a long cigar and sat down at his desk to call Will Gentry. The Chief answered the first ring of his unlisted phone.

"It's me, Will," Shayne said.

"Mike? Where are you?"

"Home for now."

"I was starting to worry. What the hell have you been up to anyway? I've warned you before."

"Warned me about what?"

"About concealing evidence," Gentry said. "Suppose you tell me what it was you took off Willy Burk's yacht a while ago. And don't say you weren't there, because I know different. I've had the boat under surveillance, and my man made a positive identification of you."

"He should have told you then," Shayne said. "I was just taking out the garbage."

"Oh, no," Gentry said. "You can't be wanting to play games again. You just can't."

"Okay. I don't want to play games."

"Then see that you don't," the Chief said. "You and I both know that wasn't garbage you took down the river. If it's what I think it is, you're really in over your head this time, boy. Holding out on Petey Painter or me is bad enough, but I'd hate to see you picked up for suppressing vital evidence in a

Federal case, and a major case at that."

"You know I wouldn't do that."

"I know you would and a lot worse to boot, if the notion ever hit you. I also know you wouldn't be let get away with it. Uncle Whiskers doesn't have my tolerant outlook. You could be in serious trouble when they catch up to you."

"If I was doing anything—and if they caught up with me," Shayne said. "On the other hand, this is your town and you haven't caught me up to anything yet. So why don't you just assume I'm not actually trying to get away with a thing?"

"Because I know you, Mike, that's why. You play that damn luck of yours right out to the living end. You bet a lot more on a hunch than it'd ever be worth to win. You'll end up in jail on a technicality or under a slab at the morgue, and I don't want to see it."

"Relax," Shayne said. "I'll be okay. Has the man with the foot you grabbed told you what you want to know yet?"

Gentry snorted. "He's more afraid of somebody else than he is of us. No, he hasn't talked, but he will."

"Stay right with him," Shayne said. "Even if it takes all summer. Look, Will, I sent Lucy home to keep her out of things. Tell your car up her way to keep a sharp eye out, will you? I'd appreciate it."

"I've already got a detective staked out there in case of trou-



ble," the Chief assured him. "You aren't the only one around here that thinks Lucy Hamilton is tops." Gentry hung up.

Shayne settled back and put his feet up, but he didn't really have a chance to relax. Before he got comfortable his phone rang.

"Shayne here."

"I was hoping I'd reach you, Mr. Shayne." It was the voice of the woman "Mary" who had talked to him earlier in the day. "Didn't you believe what I told you this afternoon? It was the truth, you know."

"I didn't argue with you then," Shayne said, "and I won't argue now. Of course I believed it. What do you want me to do—take an oath in blood or something?"

"Well then?" There was a question in the tone. "If you believed me, why haven't you broken the case to the police?"

"Like you thought I would?"

Shayne asked in turn, "Now honestly, Mary, if that's your real name, what would you have done in my place? I'll be willing to bet it's just about what I actually did do."

"But—but you—"

"But I'm supposed to be on the side of the law," Shayne said and laughed. "That's got to be what you mean. Well, for that matter I am. Between you and the law, the law gets priority every time. On the other hand, when it gets to be a case of who comes first; me or the law; that's different. That's when I can take time out for second thoughts. You see what I'm talking about, don't you?"

"I'm beginning to be afraid I may have misjudged you," she said. "Are you trying to tell me you took the guns for your own account? If you are, I can tell you now that you made the worst possible mistake."

"I don't know about that," Shayne said. "Of course I've got no use for submachine guns myself. You know that. But on the other hand let's just say I've suddenly acquired a lot of very valuable merchandise. Now, I don't want it, so I'll sell."

"Are you offering it to me?"

"Not just you, honey," Shayne said. "Of course in view of your story I'd rather that you got it, but business and sentiment don't mix very well. If you don't want to buy, then somebody else might, and if his money's good I'll sell. If more than one of you bids, I'll do like any other business man. High bidder

takes the pot. Do you follow me?"

"I follow you all right," she said, "but suppose I don't want to buy?"

"Like I said, there can be other buyers."

"That's not what I said, Mr. Shayne. All I said was I might not want to buy your merchandise. I might have other means of acquiring it besides purchase."

Shayne said: "It won't do. It won't do at all. First of all you don't know where it is. Second you'd have to have somebody a whole lot tougher than old Bobby and Roy to take anything at all away from me. Thirdly, even if you found anybody tough enough, which I don't think you could, I can always yell for the cops. If you're trying to hijack me, you couldn't go to the law with it."

"Now that you mention Roy and Bobby," she said. "You aren't exactly number one on their hit parade for the week. Not unless you like being hit with a gun, that is. Why did you have to break Bobby's arm?"

"I'm not usually that rough," Shayne admitted. "I just don't like that little creep. He threatened my girl. If he'd ever really laid a hand on her, I'd have had to break his neck as well as his harm. You tell him that when you see him. But that's not business. Talk to your government people. If they want to do business, you phone me and tell me what they're willing to pay."

She said: "I don't know for sure

if they'll be willing to pay anything. I'll let you know. In the meantime don't sell to anybody else."

"I can't guarantee you a thing," Shayne said, "except one thing. If you get to me with a better offer before I accept somebody else's bid, then you get the goods. Just tell your people to be generous the first time around too. Once I make a deal I stick to it, so there probably won't be a chance for any second bids."

There was a long pause. Then she said: "It's possible I did mis-judge you, Shayne. I'll be in touch with you again."

"You do that," he said, "and give my regards to your family."

Her voice hardened. "Just what does that mean?"

"Just small talk. I'll wait for your call."

Shayne hung up the phone. He'd learned something, the redhead told himself. Something important that she didn't know he knew. Some of the loose pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of the case began to fit together in his mind. Things he'd wondered about or known without attaching importance to were now making a coherent picture in his mind.

It was always that way with Shayne when he was nearing solution of a case. Sometimes he thought it was a special sort of sixth sense that men destined to be detectives were born with.

He poured himself one more drink and relit the cigar which had

went out. He put his head back against the back of his big leather covered easy chair and blew smoke at the ceiling.

If I'm right, he said to himself, what will the murderer do next? He'll contact me of course, because he won't trust anyone else to do it for him. He'll make the buy and won't be too choosy about the price because he'll figure on getting it all back anyway when he kills me.

Oh yes, he'll plan to kill me. It'll be in his mind that he has to do that. He won't trust me and I won't trust him. He's going to think greed will blind me, but that will be his mistake because I'm not really as greedy as he thinks I am. That's my edge. He can't think like me. He can only think the way he would in my place. His advantage is I don't know how many teams like Roy and Bobby he's got to use against me.

He drank the rest of the brandy and set the glass down. There was a little click as the bottom of the tumbler hit the wood of the table top, and as if that had pushed a button or given a signal, his phone began to ring again.

"Hello," he said into the instrument.

"Mr. Michael Shayne?" said a curiously flat voice.

The man's talking through a handkerchief, Shayne thought. That means he heard his voice before and might recognize it. Aloud he said, "That's right. Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. What matters is you have some of my property. I want it back."

"You're going to have to show me papers to prove it's yours," Shayne said. "I only talk after I see papers."

"You're crazy," the voice said angrily.

"No, I'm careful is all. Besides you misunderstand me. The papers I'm talking about are green and the government prints them up. Now do you get the point."

"You get paid when you deliver the merchandise," the voice said. "That's the only way I do business."

"Suit yourself," Shayne said and hung up the phone. He sat and grinned at the instrument in its cradle, and looked at the expensive wrist watch that had been a gift from Lucy Hamilton. "Thirty seconds," he said aloud.

It was exactly forty-two seconds later that the phone rang again. He picked the instrument from its cradle and asked: "Who's calling?"

"State your proposition," the flat voice said again.

"It's just about what you'd expect," Shayne said. "I want ten thousand dollars, no bill larger than a fifty, in an attache case. In exactly two hours I'll be under the west end of the Flagler Street bridge, that's the old bridge they replaced when the expressway was built. You bring the money. I'll give you the key to where your merchandise is. You can collect it any way and any

time you please. We both come alone. No cops and no robbers."

"What is supposed to make me think I can trust you, Shayne? How do I know what I'm paying for?"

"I'm ashamed of you," Shayne told him. "If you know your way around this town at all, you know I keep my word. If you don't know it yourself, check with any contacts you've got. I've handled bigger deals than this."

The other said: "You're asking me to do a lot of trusting, aren't you?"

"Not so much really," the detective said. "You know where I am, mister. If I tried a double cross, you could find me whenever you wanted. I can't find you if you give me the queer instead of good money. Besides, if I didn't deliver what I say I will, I'd never be able to make another deal in this town. Just look at it that way and you haven't a thing to worry you."

"Well—" the tone was grudging—"just as long as you remember I can find you again, and I won't phone in advance then, maybe I—"

"Take it or leave it," Shayne said flatly. "The merchandise is good. You know there's plenty of places it can be peddled if you don't want it yourself. I'm doing you a favor for a quick deal and you know it as well as I do."

"Wait a minute."

"Give me a yes or no. I'm going

to hang up this phone in just ten seconds unless you do."

"Okay. Okay. I'll buy, Shayne. I'll make the trade like you say. Only your price is too high. If I pay you ten grand, I'll lose on the whole deal. Five is the best I can do. Honest."

"Don't kid me," Shayne said. "The least you can get for one of the items is two hundred fifty bucks."

"You haven't tried selling to them spics lately," the voice protested with a ring of sincerity. "It's the outs is doing the buying. They don't have the national treasury yet. I get a hundred fifty per item and I swear on my mother's grave not a cent more."

They argued back and forth for a few minutes, until they finally settled on a figure of seventy-five hundred dollars, which was what Shayne had in mind to begin with. The bargaining gave the whole deal a ring of authenticity. After that they compared times on their two watches and hung up.

Shayne took a piece of paper out of his pocket then and dialed the number he read off from it. A man's voice answered. It might—just might—have been the same voice he'd been listening to but this time without the cloth to muffle the mouthpiece. Shayne couldn't be absolutely sure. He hung up without speaking.

He called a man he knew in the security section of the telephone

company, and shortly had a street address to write beside the phone number.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE rested for a while. That was one reason he'd set the meeting under the bridge for two hours off. He wanted a chance to relax after a rough day. His throat still felt sore where the big black had tried to throttle him.

The second reason had been to give his contact time to get the money together in small bills and to let it get fully dark. Of course it was never really dark in the center of the city, but Shayne wanted whatever cover the coming of night would give.

He phoned Lucy Hamilton and was glad to hear that no one had called or come by the apartment. He told her again to stay right where she was and to call Will Gentry at the slightest unusual happening. She tried to tell him to be careful.

Shayne left his apartment with plenty of time still to go until the rendezvous. He wanted to park a few blocks from the Flagler bridge, walk in, and try scouting the area as he went.

He had considered arresting the man who brought him the money there and then had rejected the idea. For one thing a messenger might be sent instead of the principal. He had no proof for that matter

that the man he'd talked to wasn't a subordinate. Possibly it was someone working for the woman called Mary.

Shayne didn't think so. He wasn't sure just where Mary came into the picture at all, but in spite of everything else instinct told him she wasn't the murderer. He wasn't as sure about Gonzalez. The head of Ace Import-Export just might be the prime mover in the whole affair as Mary had said.

Whoever it was, though, Shayne wanted to take him with the guns in his possession. That would be enough evidence to hold the man and could probably be used to prove murder or at least get a confession.

Mike Shayne had taken the guns so he could sell them back and so the buyer would have to deal directly with him. He wanted the man to have the weapons. It was the only way he could figure out to get to the head man both quickly and surely.

The area around the bridge had gone to seed since the expressway had been built. Traffic now went over and around rather than through those particular blocks. Stores were shuttered, and the quality of the tenants in the ancient apartments and rooming houses had gone down. Even early in the evening there weren't many people on the sidewalks or in the streets. The town was seething only blocks away, but

here Shayne kept to the shadows to avoid being conspicuous.

A minute or two before the appointed time he slipped down along the side of the bridge abutment until he could get under the span. There was enough light reflected from the river to show that he was the first to arrive.

The bank of the river had been braced at some time in the past with a rude sea wall of big boulders. Some had fallen out to slip down into the river. Those remaining were slippery with moss and mud.

Above the rocks the bank rose at a steep incline towards the underside of the bridge. Some grass and weeds grew in the dirt, but not enough sunlight ever got under there to keep vegetation healthy. Most of the slope was mud and gravel, and he had to brace himself to keep from sliding and falling.

He hadn't long to wait. He could hear the man sliding and scrambling down the other side of the bridge and then see his outline as he came down to Shayne's level. The fellow was shorter than himself, heavily built and masked. He had a woman's nylon stocking pulled over his head and a felt hat on top of that. In the semi-darkness it was impossible to make out his features through the stocking mesh.

"Is that you, Shayne?" he asked in a voice he was obviously trying to disguise by speaking in a low, hoarse tone.

"It's me. Did you bring the money?"

"You'll get the money all right." The man did not come too close. "First of all what did you bring me? What sort of a key to the merchandise? Show me."

Shayne extended his hand, holding an envelope. "In this are two pieces of paper. One is the receipt showing I rented a particular panel truck. The goods are inside the truck. The other paper is a claim check for the truck at the parking garage where I left it. The keys are in the ignition. All you do is present this claim check and then drive the stuff any place you want and unload the cases."

The man reached for the envelope, but Shayne held it back.

"Show the money first," he said.

The other had an ordinary shoe-box under his arm. He set it down carefully on the bank and took off the top. There was just about light enough to show that the box was full of tightly tied bundles of currency.

Shayne reached down and dropped the envelope on top of the money, and then took hold of the box by the side, but didn't pick it up. That brought him within arm's length of the other man. The man didn't like being that close, but there was nothing he could do about it.

He reached down and got the envelope and opened it to verify the contents. Then he took a couple

of rapid steps backwards. When he spoke at last his voice sounded relieved and forgot to disguise the tone.

"This seems to check out okay," he said. "Lucky for you that it does, Shayne."

The detective knew he'd heard that voice before though he wasn't absolutely sure where or when.

"You're mighty sure of yourself," Shayne said. "How do you know I'm not still planning to cross you?"

The masked man snorted what was probably meant for a scornful laugh.

"I don't know," he said, and took another step backwards which brought him out from under the bridge. "As a matter of fact I don't even care." He started to climb up the bank to the street.

As he climbed another man passed him coming down the bank. There was a scrabbling of feet in the dirt on the other side of the bridge also.

Shayne was still under the middle of the bridge, bent over with his hand holding the box of money. The fellow in the mask was gone, but there was a big man in front of Shayne and another behind him. The one in back of him was swinging an eighteen inch length of iron pipe. The other, in front, was making little flicking motions with his hand so that the light reflected off what Shayne assumed to be a knife with a five or six inch blade.

"Don't make no fool sudden

move, mister detective," the man in front of him said. "We goin' take that box of money first. Then we all waits till we gets the word is okay let you go on you way." From his voice he was from one of the newly independent British islands.

"That's right," the second man said in the same oddly clipped accents. "You just be real good, an' nobody gits hurt. Likewise I just as soon bend this here pipe over your skull."

"Real nice of you boys to think of me so kindly," Shayne said. "How do you want to take this money?"

They were both still several feet from where he stood, but Shayne had no illusions about immediate action. If he tried to draw his gun on the man in front, the one behind would nail him for sure. On top of that the ground was sloping and so slippery that any sudden action was likely to end up with him sliding into the dirty brown muck of the river, "too thick to swim and too wet to plow."

"Just stay right like you is," the man behind him said and stepped closer. "Soon as I get set to bust your head, Albert will step forward and relieves you of the box. Then we all just waits for the word."

"Waits for the word hell," Shayne thought to himself. "As soon as they get their hands on this government lettuce, I go into the river with a smashed head."

Aloud he said only: "How much is your boss paying you for this job?

Chances are good I can beat it."

The man behind him was apparently the spokesman for the pair.

"Not a chance, big man," he said. "Not any chance at all. We is goin' do like we're told. Just you step up, Albert, and relieve Mr. Policeman of all that nice money."

"Thank you, Cecil," the other said. "I'm on my way." He moved forward a couple of steps, slipped and almost lost his footing but caught himself in time.

Behind the detective Cecil moved in closer. Shayne knew, rather than saw, that he had the length of pipe raised up ready to bring down on his head at the first sign of resistance. He didn't move except to let his left knee drop to the mud for support. He was bent over almost horizontal to the mud with his right hand holding to the shoe box.

Albert put his knife between his teeth to give himself two free hands. He stooped over, bracing himself with his left hand and put his right on the money.

Shayne's right hand let go of the box and his fist came up to smash Albert's mouth. He was off balance so it really wasn't much of a punch, but the knife twisted and cut both sides of the man's mouth. At the same instant Shayne dove forward to cut the man's legs out from under him.

Albert fell forward onto Shayne's back just as Cecil swung the iron pipe with all his strength. There was a heavy thud of metal on flesh and

a cracking sound as Albert's right shoulder was splintered. He fell off Shayne's back and rolled into the river, screaming till the filthy water filled his mouth.

Mike Shayne was flat on his face by that time with his chin in the mud and the box of money under his belly. He bent both legs as far as he could and frog-kicked Cecil's ankles as hard as possible; at the same instant rolling to his right and slightly down the slope.

Cecil hit the mud on his face with a "whomp" that knocked his wind out. The next thing he knew the muzzle of Shayne's big forty-five Colts was staring him in the face.

"You better go help your buddy," Shayne told him and got up. "I don't think he can swim so good."

He drew back his foot and kicked the prostrate man down the slope and into the river, where Albert was already floundering and trying to catch hold of the slimy rocks.

"Enjoy yourselves, boys," Shayne said.

He got himself out from under the old bridge and up to the street. As he went he put his gun back in its holster and the box of money under his jacket. He could hear them splashing and cursing him and each other in the water.

IX

THE REDHEAD found a bar open close to where he left his car and went into the washroom. He got

his face and hands washed and used paper towels to scrub the worst of the wet mud off his clothing. His jacket and pants were still sopping wet in front but there wasn't a thing he could do about that.

Mike Shayne bought a double shot of whiskey and drank it standing at the bar. At least it took some of the taste of mud out of his mouth.

He figured he had plenty of time, but didn't delay any longer. It wasn't likely that Cecil and Albert would show up at that particular bar, but they might. If they did, they might force him to kill one or both of them.

Shayne drove to the address he had written down on the paper in his pocket. It was only about a mile away and proved to be a small frame house. The neighborhood had once been very respectable and middle-class. It hadn't yet degenerated to an absolute slum, but all the signs were starting to show.

He drove around the other side of the block before parking. Then he locked the money in the trunk and cut through a driveway and so through the center of the block to the house he wanted. The old frame garage was empty and he saw no signs of the panel truck he wanted out front.

There was an ancient, sagging set of wooden steps by the back door of the house. He looked through the door's glass panes into a darkened kitchen. A couple of minutes later the pass key from the ring he always

carried when working opened the lock for him. He stepped in and noiselessly closed the door behind him.

The kitchen appliances were new and expensive. There was an oversized refrigerator-freezer, and an exhaust fan over the double-oven gas range. The outside of the building had been left unpainted, but plenty of money had been spent to make the inside comfortable. The kitchen took up the whole back of the small house.

Shayne stepped out into a hall off which opened the two bedrooms and a modernized bath. These rooms were empty. He could see lights in the front of the house and hear the modulated sound of an expensive color T.V. set.

When the big man stepped through the old-fashioned wooden bead curtain into the living room a woman sat on the couch watching television. She didn't know he was there until he spoke to her.

"Hello, Mary," Shayne said.

It was the only time he ever saw her caught completely off guard. Her face was a mask of shock and astonishment. Her mouth opened, but only a sort of huff of exhaled air came out.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," the big redhead said. "I know I'm supposed to be at the bottom of the Miami River by now. I just don't like night swims though, so I put Albert and Cecil in my place. Sort of figured they'd fit there better

than I would. Last I saw they were having a high old time."

She gagged and gobbled her words for a minute before she could speak. Then all she managed at first was: "What—How did—"

"I find you?" Shayne finished the question for her. "That part wasn't hard after I remembered who you and the pretty girl on the front desk at Ace Import-Export both reminded me of. Mother and daughter, aren't you?"

She just looked at him, so he went on. "Before she thought, Nita gave me the phone number here. When I dialed it tonight and got the same voice that had just been making a deal with me everything began to come clear."

Mary still said nothing at all. If thoughts could have killed, Shayne was sure Nita would have dropped dead at that moment wherever she was.

"You're just unlucky, lady," he said. "Now just go on watching the show till the man of the house gets back."

He picked the phone out of its cradle and dialed a call to Will Gentry at his office. He was pleased to note that, even though he hadn't pulled his gun the woman made no move to get out of the chair and kept her hands in sight.

It was all of fifteen minutes until Shayne heard the panel truck turn into the driveway beside the house. He flatteneded himself against the

front wall near the door. When the driver let himself in with a key, Shayne stepped out and put the gun in his back. A moment later Chief Gentry and his aide, Lieutenant Maine came across the street and in by the still open door.

"Who've you got?" the Chief asked.

"Meet Mr. and Mrs. Kahn," Shayne said. "Mr. Jake Kahn that is. Warehouse manager for Ace Import. Gun runner. Smuggler of assorted odds and ends. The man who ordered Willy Burk knifed and me put in the river. Big brain of the wharf rats—and his charming lady who brained the caper."

"You go to hell!" Kahn said, and spat on his own expensive living room carpet.

"There's a truck full of guns in the garage," Shayne said. "I sold them back to him as the only way of making absolutely sure who he was. If he'd had sense enough to let me keep them; it'd have been a lot rougher to get the goods on him."

The redhead went on to tell the Chief the story of his day's activity up to the encounter under the bridge.

"This pair of geniuses were using the Ace set-up for a cover for smuggling," he explained then. "Ordinary stuff going in and out Jake took care of right at the docks. Guns and maybe dope were too hot for that, so they got the bright idea of having old Willy rendezvous with the ships off the Bahamas for those deals.

"After a while Willy got greedy and wanted to put the bite on. Also I guess the Federals were nosing around. Anyway Jake — or more probably Mary here—got the bright idea of killing two birds with one stone.

"First of all they had Willy knifed. Probably Cecil and Albert took care of that chore for them. That stopped the blackmail. It still left them facing a possible gun-running rap with Uncle Whiskers though, so they made it a combined operation with the help of Mary Kahn's daughter, Nita.

"They took out insurance on Willy, using the Ace Company name and letterhead. That way they figured the police and insurance people would investigate. The guns would be found and Ace blamed for the whole deal.

"Last night Mary went back to the boat to see if the guns had been turned up yet. She found me. When I went to Ace in the morning Nita listened on the intercom and heard Gonzalez offer me a bonus. They figured he'd get suspicious after that, and they'd better work fast. Meanwhile they put a price on my head just in hopes somebody'd try to collect.

"Jake had me attacked in the ship's hold. That failed. Mary hired Roy and Bobby to snatch Lucy and me so she could give me the yarn

about being Madame Counter-spy and tell me where to find the guns. They figured that way I'd bring the Feds down on Gonzalez before he had time to catch them out."

"Only you stole the guns yourself and crossed them up," Gentry said.

"Exactly. By then I'd guessed who Nita was and pretty well who the man had to be. All that was left was to nail Jake, so I set it up so he'd take care of that little detail himself. Nita giving me the phone number before she really knew the game was for blood made it possible for me to find this house."

"I should have told Cecil to kill you right off," Kahn snarled.

"No," Shayne said. "I'd have taken him anyhow. What you should have done was let me keep the guns. I figured you'd never do that, though. It would hurt your pride to think a dumb private dick could double-cross you and make it stick."

"How did you know I wasn't a government agent like I said I was?" Mary Kahn asked.

"That was easy to figure," Shayne said. "A Central American government would never put anybody in charge but a man. Whatever revolutions they've had haven't included the one for woman's equal rights. You just had to be lying about that.—and you see how a credibility gap can widen to take in everything else you said."

UNDER THE FIG TREE

by HAIM BEN-DOV

*Out there, a dead girl stared
sightlessly at the sky. And out
there a killer waited. Soon he
must escape — or strike again. . .*



INSPECTOR AZARIEL NISSIM let me in first, turned the ignition key on and said: "Illana Zamir is dead. This is the second murder within a

period of four weeks. I don't like it, Zohar, not at all."

"Nobody does," I agreed. "To get back to the point, Inspector—tell me, if you don't expect a robbery, why the sudden security measures at the local Farmers Bank?"

Looking at the road ahead, Nissim shrugged. "Routine, my good man, just routine."

"Two special guards at the vault, all in civilian clothes, yet you call it routine. Come now, Inspector, what's the story?"

"No comment," he smiled.

I am the crime writer on the weekly magazine "*The Flash*." And I get to see a lot of Inspector Nissim.

On arrival, fifteen minutes later, I gave up on the bank angle and concentrated on the bloodstain under the fig tree. Ovadia Gila'dy said, "It was a big puddle only an hour ago. Inspector, believe me."

"I know," Inspector Nissim agreed. "She lost lots of blood."

"The soil soaked it all," Ovadia clung to his original version, his green mouselike eyes shifting about him, a gesture often mistaken for fear.

I knew better; I was born in Gan-El, a small settlement amidst the Israeli Shomron mountain chain, raised there among the cows and chicken flocks.

In spots like Gan-El, everyone knew everything about everybody, going back for generations. That's why, unlike the inspector, I knew

Ovadia wasn't afraid at all. He was a nervous little man, curious and talkative, but nothing more.

Raphael, the only offspring of the Gila'dy family, a huge Mexican hat sideways on his big head, was standing beside his father and watched the stain, pale-faced.

Behind him, a dark-haired girl in shorts, green sunglasses and a blue shirt tied with red string, whispered to a young man in long khaki pants.

The man was naked from the waist up and heavy drops of sweat rolled freely down his forehead and cheeks. The huge pipe he had attracted my eyes—he must have carved it himself; I had seen no pipe like it in the open market anywhere. I knew something about pipes but this one was different: the stem where the filter blade was normally located was at least three to four inches long.

Curious faces crowded in the rear, tense and anticipating. Inspector Nissim said, "Did your son find the girl, Mr. Gila'dy?"

"No," Ovadia said. "This man found her." He pointed to the one in khaki pants standing behind him. The man seemed to stiffen at that. He removed his long pipe nervously from his right to his left hand.

"When was that?" the inspector's eyes wandered along the footprints in the soil under the fig tree. His eyes, brown and hard, matched the whiskers of his mustache perfectly.

Ovadia shifted his legs.

"About eleven o'clock, I think," he said.

The inspector turned to the man in khaki pants, "So you found the body of Illana Zamir. Is that correct?

"Yes, Inspector."

"I didn't catch your name." The inspector smiled.

Ovadia replied instead, "Michael



Bearman. Inspector. He is one of my best loaders. A good worker. If you ask me, I'd glady vouch—"

Inspector Nissim frowned, the smile fading, his eyes narrowing.

"Mr. Gila'dy, please," he said. "Let Mr. Bearman speak for himself, if you don't mind."

Forcing a smile of surrender, Ovadia blinked, "Oh yes, Inspector; after all, you're the law here."

The inspector's interest shifted. "Nice pipe you got there," he addressed Bearman. "May I see it, please?"

"I—sir," the man sounded reluctant.

"I collect pipes myself," Nissim explained, his soft spoken voice soothing. "Never seen one like that

before. Carved it yourself, I presume?" Bearman surrendered the pipe and the inspector examined it closely, pulling the stem off. "No filter?" He sounded genuinely amazed.

Bearman said, "Oh, I had one. I must have lost it."

Inspector Nissim returned the pipe to Bearman and the latter gave a sigh of relief. It seemed to me Bearman really feared the inspector might just decide to keep it for himself.

Ovadia kept on chattering without stopping. Neither the inspector, nor I listened to what he said. Instead I followed the inspector's eyes as he combed the footprint pattern closer. Most prints, at least the clear ones, were in the center, next to the tree.

Several questions from Inspector Nissim and Ovadia's tongue seemed adequately wound for at least ten more minutes. Visitors, this morning? Oh, yes, several. Zalman, that is, Asher Zalman, was the first one. He came early, eight-thirty, give or take a few minutes. His son was left in charge of the working team, due to a sudden toothache. He rushed to the dentist and left with Raphael's first grape cargo to the wine cellars.

Then, around nine, a loader from Zalman's team came to borrow shears. Shortly after, Sergeant Nathan Glass from the nearby military camp came over to watch the team at work, especially the girls in shorts.

Inspector Nissim interrupted, "How long did Sergeant Glass stay?"

Ovadia scratched his head.

"I don't know, Inspector," he said. "One hour or so, maybe more."

Inspector Nissim looked casually around him.

"You said visitors, Mr. Gila'dy," he remarked. "So far you told us about three. Were there more?"

Ovadia smiled. "The fourth one is a regular visitor. I don't know his name. Everybody calls him by his nickname."

Raphael filled in, "The Poet. He's the youth camp administrator. He organizes work teams and sends them to the various employers."

I heard about the camp's administrator but never met him personally. I admit I was curious about that man, in particular about his nickname. I had no idea whether he had written any poetry and wondered why the nickname when the inspector's soothing voice came through again, "That poet, Mr. Gila'dy, what time did he arrive?"

"Ten-thirty, maybe a little later."

"How long did he stay?"

"About ten minutes. Asked the team how things were going and left."

Raphael said, "He comes three-four times a week to check around. Not unusual for The Poet."

The inspector seemed thoughtful. "Hmmm," he muttered. "Does the fellow own a car?"

Raphael said, "No, he just hikes in wagons."

"Then, of course," I said, "He can't visit all the teams in the field three-four times a week. Or can he?"

"I guess he can't," Raphael admitted.

Inspector Nissim moved his leather belt and adjusted the strap slowly.

"Mr. Gila'dy," he said. "Do you have any idea why The Poet visited your team more frequently than the others?"

Ovadia Gila'dy had no idea. Neither did Raphael know. I pulled the inspector aside. "Well, what do you make of it so far?"

"Not much," he said, his voice low.

"Is The Poet our boy?"

"I doubt it," he said. "But, at least, I think I've a good idea—" He stopped talking and glanced at the people nuzzled in front of us, following every move we made.

"Keeping secrets from the press, Inspector?"

Nissim motioned towards the curious faces and kept his voice down. "I'll explain later. Promise me one thing, okay?" When I nodded, he turned his back to Ovadia and cupped his mouth. "Wait here for my labmen. They should arrive soon for print casts and such. Don't let anyone close to the fig tree. It's important we get clear casts. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Where are you heading for?" I asked.

He hesitated first, shook his head and smiled. "Well, no use holding anything back from you, is there?"

"None," I agreed.

"I'll pay a surprise visit to the adjoining team."

"Just a moment, Inspector, I pressed. "May I ask you a question before you leave?"

"I should have known," he said. "Okay, what is it?"

"What do you expect to gain by a visit? Can't you call all present down to the station and question them there under more favorable conditions?"

"In a way, yes, I could," Nissim shifted his glance from the rocks to me and back again. "I'd like my suspects to go about their business. I may see things they wouldn't volunteer information about during interrogation."

"Then you have something specific in mind. What are you looking for, Inspector? Maybe I can help."

"I'm looking for anyone who might knit during breaks."

"Knit, inspector?"

"Yes," He looked at the ground before returning to look me in the eye. "You see, Doctor Rosen maintains that the girl had been stabbed once. The lump on her head, he says, caused by falling against a stone, a tree or anything hard, didn't kill her, just knocked her out. The stab killed her. Judging by the size

of the wound it was inflicted by a round-thin-dull-pointed instrument, no more than a number five or six knitting needle. Since the flesh was ripped as it had penetrated—"

"Sounds fantastic," I said. Suggests an old lady, doesn't it?"

Nissim patted my shouler. "Don't worry," he said. "I knew some pretty young ones in my time whose knitting hobby was like an addiction. Well, I must leave now. Keep your eyes open for my labmen, will you, Zohar?"

Watching him circle the rocks, I followed his thin figure as he moved slowly towards the adjoining property, tearing some vine leaves off the bushes. For a moment or so he looked at the leaf in his hand, glanced back towards the fig tree, looked briefly at the footprints and shrugged. Smiling to himself, still holding the leaf in his hand, he sped on.

When two officers headed by Sergeant Golan arrived, I told them to wait. They didn't have to wait long. Ten minutes later Inspector Nissim was back.

"Anything?" I asked.

He nodded and looked his men over. "No need for prints now. Gergeant Golan, arrest that man!"

Michael Bearman tried to flee but the chase was short: he was caught promptly and brought before the inspector.

"Search his pockets, sergeant."

Sergeant Golan searched and came up with a pipe filter at least

three inches long. The inspector pulled the stem off the pipe he had taken from Bearman. The filter fitted snugly.

"Bearman," he said and smiled at the young man. "You told me you just lost your filter, didn't you?"

"It was loose," Bearman explained. "Guess I dropped the thing into my pocket without paying attention."

"This filter holds tightly." Inspector Nissim looked the blade over closely: scraps of vine leave were stuck in between the narrow winding grooves. He took out a vine leaf from his jacket pocket, stained here and there with brown dry blood.

"That's the weapon, Bearman, I know that," the inspector said. "But why, man? Why?"

Bearman wet his lips. "She recognized me, Inspector. I really had no choice."

"I see, so she saw you in the National Bank at Haifa during your successful robbery two months ago.

That's no reason to kill. Couldn't you just scare her off?"

Stunned, Bearman's eyes twitched.

"You knew?" he asked.

"Yes, my good man," Nissim said. "I knew all the time."

"Can't be," Bearman insisted. "You see, I shaved my moustache, tattooed my hands, shortened my hair style. If you really knew, Inspector, how come you didn't arrest me right away?"

"I didn't know you merely came here to hide. I thought you planned to rob our little bank and got ready to catch you red-handed had you tried."

"But how did you know it was me?"

"Simple, Bearman. Crimes always leave scars and they show clearly if you know where to look."

Confused, Bearman examined his hands briefly. "Where? I don't see anything."

"In the eyes, Bearman, in the eyes."



ALWAYS A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVEL EVERY ISSUE

MURDER IS NO MAN'S FRIEND

*Dark and murky are the ways of sudden death, and
Murder is no man's friend. But there still was one last
thing to do. Flagg nodded grimly, drew his .38 . . .*

by **WILLIAM JEFFREY**



FLAGG tripped the lock with a piece of celluloid from his coat pocket, shoved open the door, and went into the room with the .38 Special held easily in his right hand. He said, "Lie still, the both of you."

The thin, very pale man and the lithe redhead were caught up in each other's arms in the middle of the iron frame bed. They remained that way, and Flagg thought that they looked like a very good imitation of a sculpture by Rodin. He

shut the door, and went over and stood by the wall next to the window.

"Get up, Karensky," he said.

Pete Karensky pushed the redhead away and gained his feet. He stood awkwardly, his narrow shoulders trembling. There was sweat beading on his forehead.

The redhead folded a thin cotton wrapper tightly around herself and lay there looking scared.

"What the hell?" Karensky said

A NEW EXCITING NOVELET



in a reedy, tremulous voice. "Who are you? You're not a cop."

"No," Flagg said. "I'm not."

"Then what do you want?"

"Just the money."

"What money?"

"One hundred and eleven thousand dollars," Flagg said patiently.

"The take from the Herald Armored Car heist this morning."

Karensky's face became even paler. "I don't know anything about that. How would I know anything about that?"

"Because you were the inside man," Flagg said. "Somebody had to plant that gas package in the armored car's heater duct. Somebody who knew how to rig a solenoid so that it could be set off by a radio signal. A mechanic, Karensky. A mechanic with access to the armored car. A Herald mechanic. You, Karensky. You're the boy."

Karensky was trembling violently now, and his face had the color and consistency of tainted buttermilk. Looking at him, Flagg wondered how a pro like Gino Trenotti could have put his trust in such a jellyfish. But in order to pull the job off, Trenotti had needed an inside man and he'd apparently figured that it was worth the risk. He'd figured wrong.

Flagg said, "Where's the money?"

"Listen," Karensky said. "Listen. What makes you think I know where the money is? I don't know anything about it."

"You're only going to make it hard on yourself."

"You think I killed him, don't you?" Karensky said. His voice had risen into a shrill falsetto. "You think I shot this guy, this Trenotti, and took the money for myself."

Flagg watched him.

"I don't care how it looks!" Karensky said. "I didn't kill him! I couldn't kill a man. I couldn't kill anybody!"

"Trenotti's dead," Flagg said.

"I tell you, I don't know anything about it."

"Then why did you run?"

"I was scared," Karensky said. "It—it just got to me after awhile. I got sick at the garage early this morning, and they sent me home. I didn't want to leave, because this Trenotti told me to stay put on the job, but they wouldn't let me stay. They said if I was sick, I had to go home. What could I do? I had to go, and I was sitting in the apartment with Shari when I heard about the hold-up on the radio."

"And about Trenotti being found with the bullet in his throat, right there beside the armored car, and the money gone and the solenoid gas package still in the heater. I knew they'd tie it to me, I knew they would. So I packed some things and we left. We figured to get down into Mexico maybe."

Flagg held the .38 steadily in his right hand. The fear was wetly apparent on Karensky's sallow face, and the more Flagg looked at him

the less he liked Karensky for the hit. It took courage to doublecross a man like Trenotti, a pro, a tough loner who'd been around for twenty years, and it took cold nerve to put a bullet into a man's throat while he was looking at you.

"Listen," Karensky said, spreading his hands in an almost feminine gesture of helplessness, "if I'd killed Trenotti, wouldn't I have pulled that solenoid package from the heater? Wouldn't I? That's the thing that wraps it up for the cops, that package. Without it, they don't know how the gas got in the armored car to knock out the guards and they can't say for sure that there was an inside man. Isn't that right?"

"Maybe," Flagg said. He looked at the redhead on the bed. "Are you Shari?"

She nodded, wetting her lips and staring at him out of huge luminescent green eyes. She wasn't half bad looking, Flagg thought, but she couldn't have had much in the way of intelligence to have taken up with a guy like this Karensky.

He said, "Where were you at eleven o'clock this morning?"

"With Pete."

"Where?"

"At his apartment."

"What time did you leave?"

"When we heard on the radio about the hold-up."

Flagg studied her. She had one of those faces that were as easy to read as a first grade primer. He didn't



think her answers had been rehearsed dialogue. He would have been able to tell simply enough by her eyes and the expression on her mouth if they had been.

"All right," he said. He started away from the wall, moving toward the door.

Karensky was leaking perspiration onto the bare throw rug at his feet. He said, "What—what are you going to do now?"

Flagg opened the door, looked out into the hallway, and then stepped into the doorway with his left hand on the knob and his right holding the .38 at waist level.

He said then, "If I was you, Karensky, I'd stay right there. I wouldn't try to run any further. I found you this once, without any

trouble at all, and I can find you again. Here or in Mexico or anywhere else. The easier you make it for me to reach you if I want you, the better it's going to be."

"But the cops—"

"Take your choice," Flagg said and stepped back into the hallway, slamming the door.

He put the .38 Special away, buttoned his coat at the waist, and went down the creaking wooden stairs at the far end of the hallway. It was an old building, in a tenement district of a city two hundred miles south of San Francisco. It reminded him of the one in the Upper West Side of New York City, where he'd lived as a boy.

But he had no bitterness for it; that was a long time ago, in another time and another world, and he'd profited by it the same way you profited by all your experiences.

He hesitated in the black entranceway of the building for a moment, listening and peering into the dark night. A small neon sign above the entrance buzzed to itself; the H and O of HOTEL flickered, casting a pale spotlight on the cracked sidewalk in front of him.

Flagg crossed the street to his car, parked facing the entrance to Highway 101 a block away. The car was unlocked on the driver's side, and latched on the safety catch only, just as he had left it. He drove north, toward San Francisco.

Traffic was light in both directions, and he made good time

through Paso Robles, King City, and Salinas. It picked up some when he passed through Gilroy and Morgan Hill because of the long stretch of well-lit, suburban development, and just before San Jose he ran into a road gang repaving a quarter-mile section. The blinking barricades and reflector cones which had been set up to block off one lane reminded Flagg of the way Trenotti had pulled off the Herald Armored Car heist.

Trenotti had always been one to take advantage of any given situation, and when he had learned of the detour on River Valley Road in the East Bay it hadn't taken him long to think up a way of using it.

River Valley ran from San Ramon to Martinez, two small towns a little way east of Oakland, but it had fallen into disuse after the straighter, four-lane 560 had been built. It was still the only way of reaching Lamont Laboratories, one of those places a good heist man like Trenotti always kept in the back of his mind.

Lamont was one of many government-contract, aero-space companies in the area, not much different from the others except for the fact that it was controlled by a brilliant but eccentric old man who still believed cash was better than checks.

Top-paid engineers and a large blue-collar section of assemblers commanded a twice monthly payroll of over seventy thousand, and

Christmas bonuses jacked that up to over a hundred thousand, all in cash and all carried by Herald.

Most businessmen would have blanched at the thought of such a prime temptation, but you couldn't argue with success; and the old man had been successful, all right-up until the time Trenotti ran across the detour.

It was located just before the spot where a swollen Ridge River had washed out an old concrete bridge, and wandered through the hills for some eight miles. Narrow, mostly dirt, it angled back in to River Valley Road a mile on the other side of the bridge.

Trenotti had found it in early November, Flagg knew. He had watched two deliveries before he made his move, taking his time setting up the heist, making his arrangements for bankrolling and protection.

The hardest part of the job had been uncovering the weak link in the Herald garage, Flagg thought as he drove. Trenotti had to have canvassed each employee carefully before approaching any of them. If he'd dropped a word to the wrong one, the whole thing would have been queered.

After he'd settled on Karenky, and had his pitch accepted, it had been duck soup: the gas package rigged in the heater duct, the wait on the secondary trail until the armored truck passed on the detour, the signal from a model airplane

control to trigger the package, the pickup of the car with the tow truck after the driver and the two guards had been put out with the gas and the car had gone off the road . . .

Flagg cut off 101 onto the Nimitz Freeway. The very first rays of the dawn made the hills on his right glow slightly, as if they were being heated by a torch. That image made Flagg think of the torch Trenotti had used, the acetylene outfit, to get into the armored car after he'd brought it up onto the deserted and screened secondary trail with the tow truck.

He'd had plenty of time to make his cuts at the rear door lock, fill the waiting Buick with the sacks of money, remove the gas package and drive away. Simple and sweet, with nobory hurt, the trademark of a Trenotti hit. Except that it hadn't worked out that way.

When the driver and the two guards had come out of it, they'd seen the Buick, parked there with its gaping trunk lid open like an angry mouth. And they'd seen Trenotti lying beside it, with a bullet in his throat. The money had been gone.

The gas package which the Highway Patrol investigators had found in the heater duct of the armored car led straight to the Herald garage, and straight to Karenky because by that time he'd left town. Flagg had figured it the same way the police had: Karenky, the inside man, had staged a doublecross. But

now that he'd seen Karensky, talked to him, Flagg didn't like him for it at all.

He turned off the Nimitz onto Highway 50 and headed toward San Ramon. The police had no way of telling whether there were other accomplices besides Karensky involved, but Flagg knew that there were none. Trenotti was too much of a pro to make a slip of the tongue, and while Karensky might have, it didn't figure that Trenotti would have divulged anything more than necessary.

The only other way it could have happened, at least on the surface, was that some stranger had happened along at an opportune moment and taken advantage of the circumstances. But Flagg wouldn't buy that; simple coincidence was too enigmatic for his well-ordered mind. He was sure there was more to it than that: He felt it. Something had been overlooked.

Just on the other side of San Ramon, after the exit for 560, Flagg slowed and turned off onto River Valley Road. Three miles into there, the detour angled off to the east. A mile off that was the secondary road, and just beyond its entrance were skid marks and a crumpled section of fencing to mark the point where the armored car had gone off the road.

Flagg turned onto the secondary trail. It was little more than a rutted cart path, almost completely hidden in spots by thick underbrush. He

was forced to reduce his speed to less than ten miles an hour. He came around a stiff bend, onto a flat, grassy knoll that was hidden from River Valley Road by a heavy stand of aromatic eucalyptus.

He parked the car just off the trail and stepped out into the chill, whistling wind which fanned across the knoll. It was full dawn now, and the sun was a filtered yellow disc seen through a bank of haze to the east. Flagg shrugged into his overcoat and buttoned it up to his throat, looking around him.

There were the tracks in the soft earth made by the armored car, and by the tow truck and Buick, and by the multitude of official vehicles which had been there. Footprints obliterated some of the tracks, and there were signs of the search that had been conducted in the area: Broken branches on surrounding shrubs, tufts of earth pulled or kicked loose, cigarette and cigar butts strewn about.

Flagg stepped away from his car and went toward the stand of eucalyptus. The one thing that was bothering him at the moment was the fact that the Highway Patrol had found the gun belonging to the Herald driver to have had one shot fired from it.

The driver said that he had come awake with it in his hand, though he couldn't remember firing it or even drawing it. If he was telling the truth, then it followed that whoever had killed Trenotti had fired it.

Why? Trenotti couldn't see any reason for it, since it hadn't been the murder weapon. The same calibre, yes, but the barrel striations on the bullet they'd taken out of Trenotti were different from the ones in the driver's gun.

Flagg had thought this was going to be simple; all he had to do was find the inside man, because everything pointed to Karensky. But his intuition now told him it wasn't Karensky, and that no longer made it simple. The gun in the driver's hand, fired, complicated matters even more.

He tried to figure another angle with the driver, and he thought briefly that maybe the driver had come out of the gas and killed Trenotti with another gun, maybe one that was kept in the cab of the armored car. But that didn't wash. If the driver had been the one, why would he fire a bullet from his own gun?

Then there was the gas Trenotti had used; Flagg knew the type, and you didn't just wake up with full faculties a few minutes after exposure to it. No it had to have been somebody else, somebody who had chanced on Trenotti looting the armored car, somebody with a gun.

Flagg shook his head. To hell with it. All this speculation wasn't getting him anywhere. He didn't like the idea of prowling around up here at eight o'clock in the morning —the police had been over the area time and again the day before, and



they were pretty damned thorough —but he had no place else to start now that he had ruled out Karensky.

He made a careful search of the eucalyptus grove and the immediate area surrounding the knoll. He found nothing unusual, nothing the state police and the Highway Patrol might have overlooked. It wasn't any use; he'd just been wasting his time.

He was at the bottom of the hill now, on the other side of the knoll near the junction of the River Valley Road detour and the secondary trail. He started back up, making his way through several thickly grown oaks, and when he came out on the other side he noticed the small clearing with the

hiker's lane leading into it from the detour.

He stopped, staring down into the clearing. The hiker's lane was narrow, but wide enough for a car to pass along it. And there were tracks on its soft surface, faintly evident in the pale, early-morning light.

Flagg went down there and looked at the tracks. They were relatively fresh, no more than a day or two old. One of the police or Highway Patrol cars? That seemed the likely answer. They'd pulled in here to make a run of the area without climbing down from the knoll as he had done.

He turned, to start upward again, and a faint patch of blue caught his eye from a buildup of acorns and eucalyptus leaves and scattered silt directly in front of him. If he hadn't been looking right at it, he would never have seen it.

He went to one knee and brushed the leaves away, and a moment later he held a small, luminous blue triangle in the palm of his hand. It was about the size of a milk bottle cap, of soft felt with an adhesive backing that was collected with silt and bits of foliage now; in white in the upper right hand corner were the letters *LL*.

Flagg knew immediately what the triangle was: a gate badge, one that allowed visitors admittance to the restricted grounds of certain government-subsidized companies in

the area. Companies like Lamont Laboratories.

Flagg put the triangle in the pocket of his overcoat and climbed to the knoll again. He started his car, drove down onto the detour, and followed it through to where it once more connected with River Valley Road. A mile beyond that point, the enclosed grounds of Lamont Laboratories lay spread back into the foothills, the green pastel building shining dully in the diffused sunlight.

He passed by the main entrance gate without slowing and drove to the outskirts of Martinez. He stopped at a cafe there, went into a phone booth at the rear of the dining area, and put in a collect call to Churlak at his private number in San Francisco.

"Flagg," he said when Churlak came on.

"What happened with Karensky?"

"Nothing. He's not our boy."

"No?"

"No," Flagg said. "But I might have something anyway."

"Go ahead."

Flagg told him about the gate pass he had found, and how he thought he might follow it up. He told Churlak what he would need, and Churlak said all right, that he could have it for him by eleven. He named a drop in Oakland.

Flagg said, "This might be a dead end, too. I'm still grabbing at straws."

"Keep after it," Churlak said.

"I'll be in my office all day, until about six tonight."

"Right," Flagg said. He hung up and went out into the dining area and ordered breakfast.

While he was waiting for it, he thought about the way Churlak handled things. Quietly, without fanfare and without a lot of unnecessary violence and emotion, the way the Organization itself had become over the years.

Flagg liked the free hand Churlak gave him; he didn't care to work under pressure. The Organization had bankrolled Trenotti on the Herald job, and they had promised him protection for their ten percent cut; but who could figure something unforeseen like this screwing things up?

That hundred and eleven thousand belonged to the Organization now—and so did Trenotti's killer in one way or another. Churlak had made that abundantly clear. How would it look if a man the Organization had backed was murdered without justice? Still, there was no pressure, and to a troubleshooter like Flagg, that made all the difference in the world.

He finished his breakfast, had a second cup of coffee, and drove leisurely into Oakland. The item he had requested of Churlak was waiting at the drop when he checked it at ten-forty.

BILL FLAGG came to a stop at the main entrance to Lamont Labora-

tories a little past noon. He rolled down the window and smiled as the uniformed guard left his cubicle and approached the car.

"Afternoon," Flagg said pleasantly.

The guard nodded disinterestedly. "Afternoon." He had asthma and breathed heavily and noisily with his mouth open. "Can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Bernstein, in Security," Flagg said.

The guard nodded again and gave him a shiny blue triangle similar to the one he had found earlier. "Main building's to your left, last one in the row. Be sure to sign the register when you get there."

Flagg attached the badge to the lapel of his suitcoat and drove inside and parked in the wide area in front of the main building. Inside a tile-and-glass-enclosed foyer, a tall girl with raven hair and go-to-hell eyes sat behind a receptionist's desk. There was a black leather register on the counter in front of her, and she watched as Flagg signed it.

"Oh, yes, Captain Seiverson," she said, turning the register so that she could read it. "Mr. Bernstein is expecting you. I'll tell him you're here."

"Thank you," Flagg said.

She picked up the phone on her desk, dialed a number and spoke briefly into the receiver. Three minutes later Bernstein came out. He was thin and angular, and what little hair he had left was distributed

in a vain attempt to conceal his spreading baldness. He shook Flagg's hand gravely, and when Flagg flipped open the black leather wallet Churlak had supplied him with, Bernstein glanced at it only cursorily.

Flagg wondered if it was worth all the trouble the Organization had to go through to make up a false ID—especially one that said you were a state police captain—when people seldom even looked at it; but then he decided that the first time you went in without it, some guy like Bernstein would ask to inspect your credentials.

Flagg followed Bernstein through a cell block of partitioned offices to a slightly larger one at the far end. Bernstein sat behind his functional gray-metal desk, indicating a modernistic chair to one side for Flagg. He leaned forward on his elbows and made a church steeple of his hands.

"I really don't know what more I can tell you aside from our conversation on the phone, Captain," he said when Flagg had seated himself. "We must hand out those blue badges at a rate of a hundred a week. The regular employees have more permanent identification badges, the kind you pin on, and the delivery trucks get yellow circles from the South Gate.

"Company representatives, visitors, salesmen—hell, everybody who has any kind of business at Lamont gets one of the blue ones." He

made an apologetic gesture toward Flagg's lapel. "You were given one yourself."

"Then the only record of incoming visitors is that register I signed at the receptionist's desk?"

"I'm afraid so," Bernstein said. "It's like I said when you called, we aren't concerned with government security. There's no top secret cloak-and-dagger here, and hence no need for clearances and the like. We use the blue and yellow badges as personnel control, that's all."

"It's only if somebody wanders into a section with the wrong color that they come to anybody's attention. But the only entrance to this building is through the lobby, the way you came in, and the person you want to come out and escort you in. That's a long-standing Lamont policy."

"Uh-huh," Flagg said. He rubbed at his left ear. "I'd like to see yesterday's register sheets, if I can."

"Of course," Bernstein said. He got to his feet and walked to the door. "I think my secretary still has them. I'll be right back."

Flagg sat there and stared at a faded print of three mallards in a pond which hung in back of Bernstein's desk. Then he got out his pipe and packed it and lit it, and thought about the blue badge and wondered again why the Herald driver's pistol had been fired.

Bernstein came back carrying a

manila folder and handed it to Flagg.

"You understand, these sheets aren't really reliable," he said. "A person could put down any name at all, or none for that matter if Miss Osgood, the receptionist, happens to be away from her desk. They're never checked that closely. Visitors just sign them automatically, and we file them away. Maybe two or three times a year some salesman will call us for verification that he was here when he said he was, or the salesman's boss will call for the same reason. That's about all."

Flagg opened the folder and looked at the six by eight and one half by eleven sheets inside. Like the one he had signed earlier, each had been mimeographed with columns for Name, *In Time* and *Out Time*, *Person Visited*, and *Company Represented*. On the top of each was the date. Flagg scanned the six sheets carefully, asking questions when he came to an entry which was illegible or sparked his curiosity. Near the bottom of the third page, he came upon a childish backhand scrawl.

"This one," he said. "Grady, is it?"

Bernstein squinted at the page. "Looks like that's the name, yes. From Herald Armored Car Service, and here to see Jack Culp in Accounting."

Flagg said, "Can you get Culp in here?"



"Right away," Bernstein told him.

Culp was shaking hands with Flagg less than five minutes later, a small thick-set man who seemed a little nervous. Flagg showed him the register sheet and asked him about his Grady from Herald Armored Car.

"Yes, yes, I know him," Culp said. "First name is Richard, but we call him Rudy. That's because he has a red face; always looks like he's blushing, if you know what I mean."

"What did he do here?"

"Helped us handle the payroll and bookkeeping. We have our own staff—I'm head of that section—but Herald sends out young men like Rudy to help train them for their regular accounting service."

"Grady didn't come in an armored car, then?"

"No, no," Culp said. "He never carried any money or anything of real value, so he would arrive a little after the car in one of the company wagons. You know the

kind; they have the Herald shield on the door, but a sign beneath it saying that there isn't anything but records inside."

Flagg nodded, looking at the Time columns on the register sheet. "Grady was here from ten-forty to half past three yesterday. Is that right?"

"Well, I don't know about that," Culp said. "I didn't see him until I came back from lunch sometime around one."

"Can anybody else verify that he was here from ten-forty until you saw him at one?"

"I couldn't say. He was at a desk when I—"

"Get me the receptionist on the phone," Flagg said to Bernstein.

Bernstein complied, and Flagg said to the girl, "Were you on duty yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Do you recall a Richard Grady from Herald arriving?"

"Grady? Oh yes, Rudy."

"Who met him?"

"Why, it was Mr. Culp, I suppose." There was a pause, and then she said, "No, it seems to me that he signed in as he usually does, but when I mentioned that the armored car hadn't arrived, he frowned and said something about forgetting some books. He went out and that was the last I saw of him until just before Mr. Culp came back from lunch at one. Another man from Accounting took him in."

"Thank you," Flagg said. He

hung up and turned to Bernstein. "I'd like a duplicate copy made of this sheet."

FIFTEEN MINUTES later, Bill Flagg was on his way to Oakland again.

He got there just at two, threaded his way through the early afternoon traffic, and parked in front of the telephone company on 9th Street. In the lobby, he went through every directory within a radius of fifty miles; there were seven Gradys, Richard or R., in the nine Bay Area counties.

He went down the street to a luncheonette and changed two one dollar bills into dimes. Then he came back to the telephone company and began calling.

By two forty-five he had the list narrowed down to two; Richard Grady, in El Cerrito, and R. D. Grady, in San Francisco. The other five had checked out negative; the phone had been answered at each of them, by four women and an old man with a cracked voice, and none of them knew a Richard Grady who worked for Herald Armored Car Service. There had been no answer at the other two.

Since El Cerrito was on this side of the Bay, Flagg decided to check that one first. He got onto the freeway and drove north and exited at the first El Cerrito off ramp. He stopped for a map at the first service station he saw, found the street he wanted on it, and ten minutes

later he was in the foyer of a new wood-and-glass apartment building.

He rang the bell marked *Manager*, and an answering buzz let him into the building. He showed the thin, hatchet-faced woman who descended the stairs the ID Churlak had gotten for him, and said that he was looking for a Richard Grady who worked for Herald Armored Car Service on a police matter. She told him that the Richard Grady who lived there was with the Merchant Marine, and had been at sea for the past two months. Flagg thanked her and got his car and headed for the Bay Bridge.

If he drew a blank at this last one, in San Francisco, it had to be that the Grady he wanted either didn't have a phone or if he did, had an unlisted number. Or there was the possibility that he lived outside the fifty mile radius Flagg had checked. But Flagg didn't think that was likely, considering the location of Herald.

The San Francisco address was a two-storied Victorian on Fulton, across from Golden Gate Park; each of the stories was a privately contained flat, with twin front entrances facing the Park and the continual flow of traffic on Fulton. That wasn't good. Flagg wondered if there were rear entrances, and decided that there would be.

He parked the car on Eighteenth Avenue and opened the trunk. He took out a clipboard and a sheaf of gas meter tabulators and an iden-

tification card that said he was George Axley, a meter reader with Pacific Gas & Electric. He had found occasion to use these props often enough in the past to carry them regularly.

He walked up to the Grady address and climbed the stairs to the porch. There were two mailboxes there, the one for the ground floor marked *Grady* and the other marked *Chesire*.

Flagg rang the bell above the one marked *Grady* and waited; there was no answer. He moved down off the porch, walked up a block to a service station, and looked up *Chesire* on Fulton Street in the telephone directory. There was a listing. Flagg put a dime in the slot and dialed the number, and a woman's sleepy voice answered. Flagg said that he was a lawyer named Simmons and that he was trying to locate a Richard Grady who worked for Herald Armored Car Service, to talk to him about a bequest from a maiden aunt in Illinois. Was that the Richard Grady who lived downstairs from her?

The woman said yes, it was, and Flagg thanked her and hung up before she could think to ask how he'd supposedly gotten her number.

He returned to the block and began to read meters for the first four buildings. He had to go into the rear yards each time to do so, and at the second one a fat woman who smelled of Chianti came out

and he had to show her the Axley identification.

When he stepped into the back-yard of Grady's place, he looked up at the windows on the second floor flat to make sure Mrs. Chesire wasn't looking out. They were curtained and empty. High wooden fences screened the yard from neighbors on both sides, and from the houses whose small yards were directly to the rear.

He had another look around and satisfied himself that he was unobserved. There was still a risk in what he was going to do, but it had to be taken; Chulak paid him to take risks, and he would be there with a brace of attorneys if Flagg took a fall for anything. He went up to the rear door, taking the strip of celluloid from his pocket.

It took him an hour to search the flat. He found nothing, except evidence that the Richard Grady who lived there was a bachelor with a well-stocked bar and a blue address book containing the names of several dozen girls, and that he was an employee of Herald Armored Car Service. An envelope of check stubs which Flagg found in a drawer of the writing desk in the dining room confirmed that. But there was no sign of the money. Wherever he had it, it wasn't here.

Flagg left the way he had come in, quietly and unobtrusively. Nobody stopped him, and nobody looked at him twice. He walked down to his car, put the clipboard

and the PG&E identification away in the trunk, and took an old army blanket and a paperback novel out of it. He walked into the Park and spread the blanket out on the grass directly opposite Grady's flat, beneath one of the oak trees there.

It was more than a little cool by that time, but there were a few hippies sprawled on the lawn in the general vicinity and two old men sitting cross-legged and playing chess on a footstool. Flagg sat down on the blanket, facing Grady's flat. He pretended to read the book and listened to the buzz of the traffic going past on Fulton Street and waited.

Grady got home at six-thirty, when it was completely dark.

Flagg's attention was first drawn to the car, a two-year-old Camaro painted a fluorescent racing orange. Traffic had thinned out considerably, and the driver geared down with a loud report of his exhausts and came by slowly in the far right lane, looking for a parking place.

It was Grady, all right; Flagg could see him clearly enough in the light from the streetlamps, and he was just as Culp had described him. He went up to the Seventeenth and turned. Flagg sat there and listened to the Camaro being parked on the street.

A few moments later, Grady came walking around the corner. He moved splay-footed, looking neither right nor left. He went directly into his flat.

Flagg got up and went back to his car, put the blanket and the paperback away in the trunk, and walked around to Seventeenth to where the Camaro was parked. There were no other parking places in the block, and there weren't any in the next block, either.

He sat down on the stoop of another Victorian nearby, took out his pipe and lit it. A half hour passed, and a woman came down the street and got into an old black sedan at the curb. Flagg hurried quickly back to his car, circled the block, and parked in the spot the woman had vacated.

The Camaro was five cars ahead of him now, on the opposite side of the street. He relit his pipe and settled down to wait. He could afford to wait; he didn't think that Grady could.

The wait lasted little better than four hours. He switched on the car radio at ten to listen to the news, and Karenky was still at large. But the police would pick him up before long, Flagg knew; he didn't have a prayer of getting into Mexico.

When Flagg saw Grady turn the corner onto Seventeenth and walk to the Camaro, he sat up on the seat with his eyes unblinking. Grady was dressed in Levis and a sheepskin work jacket. He seemed to be preoccupied; his movements were quick and jerky. He got into the Camaro. Flagg gave him a block

lead and then pulled out behind him.

The tag was easy. Flagg had a good general idea of Grady's destination, somewhere near the heist point on River Valley Road. He hadn't had time to do more than cache the money temporarily, and then make more permanent plans. Tonight, tomorrow night—but soon, before Karenky was picked up and the police started looking somewhere else again—Grady was going to have to move. It looked like tonight.

They crossed the Bay Bridge, turned toward Sacramento on Interstate 80, and exited at Martinez. Traffic slackened, and Flagg dropped further back, but Grady drove the way a man does when he's unaware of being shagged.

He swung onto River Valley Road, and they passed through the small town of Pacheco; not far beyond its limits, Grady's stop lights blinked and he veered to the right. Flagg slowed when he reached the spot, peering off into the darkness. It was a road not much better than the one being used as a detour, maybe ten miles to the north of that one and Lamont Laboratories.

Flagg cut his lights and turned onto the road. It was relatively straight, bounded by farmland on either side, but then the low, rolling Briones Hills began. At that point, the road began to curve and Flagg slowed down to a crawl. His car had an extremely quiet engine,

but he didn't want to take any chances that Grady would hear him coming on the curves and bypass the money.

He had gone almost two miles when he heard the Camaro's loud exhausts as Grady downshifted and gunned the engine out of habit before shutting it off. Flagg came around a bend, cutting his own engine, and there was a small lane consisting of two wheel ruts which angled sharply down the slope on his left, into a clump of oaks and eucalyptus.

A Lover's Lane during the summer months, maybe, Flagg thought, a place Grady would be familiar with. He drifted to a spot along the side of the road and stepped out, shutting the car door soundlessly.

There was the steady, rhythmic sound of crickets, but that was all. Flagg took a firm grip on the woven leather sap he had transferred earlier from the car's trunk to the pockets of his suit coat; then, slowly, heel-and-toe, he made his way down the slope, blending into the shadows cast by the trees. He came up to the edge of a clearing and saw the Camaro ahead of him with its trunk lid standing open. He stopped, listening.

On the other side of the clearing, directly in line with the Camaro, there were soft, almost indistinct scraping sounds. Rock against rock, Flagg thought. He edged through the trees, around the rock circle

of the clearing, taking his time and working his way to the left of the scraping movements.

A pale yellow elongation of light pinpointed Grady's exact location. It came from a flashlight propped on top of one of three new but inexpensive pasteboard suitcases. The beam was trained on a pile of small boulders, like a grave marker, which Grady was hurriedly unstacking.

Flagg waited until Grady had rolled away the last of them, and then he went up and hit him on the back of the neck with the sap. Grady fell without a sound.

The money was there, in the canvas sacks with the Herald emblem and name imprinted on them. Flagg made his way up to his car, drove it down to the clearing, and backed it around the Camaro. He emptied the sacks into the three suitcases and put the suitcases in the trunk of his car.

Then he went over to where Grady lay and searched him carefully. In the pocket of Grady's sheepskin jacket was the Herald service revolver which Flagg knew had fired the bullet they'd found in Trenotti's neck; in his wallet were five receipts for safe deposit boxes at five different Bay Area banks.

Flagg put the gun and the receipts into the pocket of his coat and went to the Camaro. He lifted the hood and took off the distributor cap. Then got into his car and drove out of there.

It all mashed nicely together, he thought as he started back toward San Francisco. The blue triangle had been the key, because it had opened up the possibility of the killer somehow having been connected with Lamont Laboratories. When Flagg had seen Grady's name on the register and learned of his routine and his unusual absence on the day of the heist, it had all fallen into place.

The way Flagg saw it, Grady had been ten or fifteen minutes behind the armored car, as usual. The skid marks and the broken fence railing on the detour hadn't meant anything to him until he had learned of the armored car not arriving at Lamont. Flagg doubted that Grady had suddenly realized a robbery was taking place; more likely, he knew that there was trouble and was covering for the company by checking it out before calling in.

Grady had doubled back, figured out where the car had gone by the now-meaningful skid marks and railing, and parked in that clearing off the hiker's lane. He had gone quietly up the hill, seen what was going on and that Trenotti was the only man, and for some reason known only to him—maybe he was in debt, maybe it was just the lure of the money—he had taken advantage of the situation and killed Trenotti and completed the heist himself.

The shot fired from the driver's gun was easily explainable. Grady

had done it in a foolish effort to throw the police off in the event they failed to check ballistics. It was something an amateur would do to cover himself. Grady couldn't have known about Karensky, or that the police would tag the inside man for the killing.

He'd cached the money far enough away so that a general search wouldn't uncover it, but close enough so that he wouldn't be away from Lamont for too long a time. He had played it cool the rest of the day and night. Today, once he knew that the heat was all on Karensky, he had taken out the safe deposit boxes, and tomorrow he would have placed the money in them.

Six months, maybe a year from now, he would have quit Herald and gone off somewhere with the swag. And it would have worked, too, Flagg thought—if Trenotti hadn't come to the Organization in the very beginning.

When Flagg reached Oakland, he drove into the heart of the city and stopped at the Greyhound Bus Depot. He went inside and put Grady's service revolver and the safe deposit slips and the photocopy of the Lamont register page which Bernstein had given him, into a locker. He returned to his car, took an envelope from the glove compartment, and addressed it to the Detective Bureau of the Oakland Police Department.

On the slip of paper he wrote:

Key fits locker Oakland Bus Depot. Concerning the Herald robbery. Then he put the paper and the key into the envelope, sealed it and stamped it and mailed it in a corner box.

Churlak had instructed him to take care of Trenotti's killer, and Flagg had done that in the new way of the Organization: legally and non-violently. Grady would come to out there on that Lover's Lane.

When he couldn't get his car started he would probably panic; but there was just no place for him to go.

In a day or so, the police would pick him up. There would be questions about how the information Flagg had given them was obtained,

but Grady had never seen Flagg at all and he couldn't say anything. Flagg had no record, and Bernstein's description of him, if the police bothered to check that far, would be useless.

Flagg didn't waste any sympathy on Grady. He'd killed Gino Trenotti in cold blood, because Trenotti had been too old a hand to have bucked a young guy with a pistol. He would have been very still and let the Organization's lawyers get him out in the event of a fall. That's what he had been paying a protection percentage for.

Bill Flagg went to find a phone—to report to Churlak what had happened, and to find out at which drop he was to leave the hundred and eleven thousand.

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The Thorn

by **GEORGE F.
BELLEFONTAINE**

He saw the stranger, and suddenly he remembered the code of his trade: "The wages of a killer are high. Even the last payment — Death!"

ANTON CERNAK was balling it up with a blonde Englishwoman in one of Madrid's more exclusive nightspots when he received the message of a telephone call. He took it in one of the private booths in the lobby.

"This can be only one person," Cernik spoke into the receiver.

"At last," the voice said, relieved. It was Paul Schmidt, Cernik's contact in Madrid. "I've been trying all the night clubs. Can you talk?"

"I'm alone at the moment," Cernik said, adding impatiently, "What the hell do you want?"

"Listen carefully," Schmidt said. "I just received an order of assassination. When I read the name I thought it was some kind of joke. I checked back and found it was true."

"Can't this wait until tomorrow?" Cernik said impatiently.

"Cernik, the person marked for death is you."

"Impossible," Cernik blurted, but the adrenalin acting on his body refuted this statement. With the initial shock done with now, he took charge of his six foot, well developed frame. To remain calm during stress, this is what they had taught him well.

"They say you sold information to the other side. They call you a traitor and an enemy of the people. All agents have been alerted. They have even put a price on your head. But worst of all, Cernik, they know you are here. That I am here. That's why you must leave Madrid immediately."

"Why are you warning me?" Cernik asked, but he anticipated Schmidt's answer.

"It is my job to kill you on sight. I have never had to kill before. And I am not a violent man, Cernik. Always I have worked through men like you. I merely know the right people in the right places and through this knowledge I can assist your people. But now—please,

Cernik, you must leave before it is too late."

"Where will I go?" Cernik asked, feeling a slight weakening in his hold on panic. "I have no friends to help me here. I have relied on you for everything since I first came to Madrid. If I try to leave by air, they will be waiting for me at the airport. If I—"

"I have already taken a risk in warning you. I can do no more. You are on your own now."

"But who can I turn to?"

"The other side paid you for information, thus getting you into this mess. Perhaps they can get you out. Whatever you do, Cernik, do not be foolish enough to contact me further. Good-by."

Cernik heard a click, then a steady buzzing. He left the phone booth, glanced quickly at the woman still at his table, sighed and left the night club.

He walked hurriedly, taking the narrow side streets, passing an occasional peasant or a tourist couple. They were faceless people and unless they pulled a gun on him they were of no importance. Saving his life was the only importance now.

Finally he stopped in front of a white stone building. He breathed deeply of the warm night air, then entered through a narrow doorway and climbed a long flight of stairs. At the top he turned right and knocked on the first door. It opened to a dimly lighted room. A husky American greeted him with an un-

smiling face of ruddy complexion. His eyes were suspicious as they gripped Cernik. His name was Regan.

"What do you want?" he asked, scratching a head of clay-red hair.

"Can I come in?"

Regan stood back, allowing Cernik to enter. The room was small and stuffy. It was furnished with a cot, a wooden chair, a table with a hot plate and a small bureau. From this bureau Regan produced a bottle and two glasses. He poured both glasses full and handed one to Cernik. Cernik took a long hard drink. It was whiskey and it made him feel just a little better.

"My people have discovered how I have been selling information to you. Now I am a walking dead man unless you can help me."

"You're one of their best men. Would they kill you without a trial?"

"Information is gathered. Verified. That is my trial," Cernik said.

"I'm sorry." Regan spoke in a barely audible tone.

"I don't want sympathy, I want help."

"I can't do anything for you, Cernik."

He couldn't believe his ears. The Americans were supposed to be grateful people. He had supplied them with important data many times in the past.

"I could tell you many things, Regan. You have to take me to your embassy. Get me out of Spain."

"I can't do that."

"I have worked for you—"

"Part of the time," Regan broke in.

"You owe me!" Cernik cried.

"I owe you nothing," Regan said sharply. "We paid you well for those little tidbits of information. I might add that much of the info you gave us was useless, stuff we already knew."

"Surely you don't mean this, Regan."

"You sold out on your country. You're not unique when it comes to that. Hell, man, is it my fault that you have expensive tastes in wine and women? You took the risk, knowing full well the consequences if you were caught. So that's that."

"But I have much more knowledge I can impart to your superiors. Just take me—"

"How do we know this isn't some kind of a plot?" Regan asked. "It's been tried before, you know. They make it look like one of their own is a traitor, hoping we'll take him to our bosom and give him the run of our country and our secrets. No, Cernik we don't take those kinds of chances. I'm sorry."

"I'll go to your embassy on my own."

"You wouldn't get one foot inside the door. They have a file on you forty inches deep."

Cerik knew it was useless. He stared at Regan for a long moment, his face a mask of contempt. Finally he turned and started toward the door.



"Tell me something," Regan called. "Who tipped you off?"

"My contact," Cernik replied.

"That mild-mannered little guy at European Imports?"

"You know him?" Cernik was mildly surprised.

"I know him all right," Regan said. "He's been a thorn in my side for as long as I can remember. But why would he tip you off?"

"Because he's supposed to kill me on sight and he lacks the courage to do so. He just wants me out of the country."

"Maybe he wants you out bad enough to help. He's a man of many means. A snap of his fingers and he could have you transported quietly to Sweden."

"Thanks for the suggestion, but I would prefer help."

"Sorry," Regan said.

Cernik shrugged and left.

He stood in the shadows for a long time, feeling alone and forsaken. It was a strange feeling for a man such as himself. He had been in many desperate situations in the past but there had always been his contact to rely on. Could he rely on Schmidt now? Perhaps Regan was correct in assuming that Schmidt would help. There was only one way to find out.

When he was certain no one was in sight, he emerged from the shadows, crossed the street to the building housing European Imports then entered a passageway and climbed a flight of stone steps to the flat where Paul Schmidt and his family lived above Schmidt's offices. Cernik knocked twice.

Schmidt opened the door. He was a thin little man approaching sixty. His dark eyes widened with fear when he saw Cernik. He stepped outside, closing the door behind him.

"I warned you not to come here."

"Help me, Schmidt."

Schmidt shrugged his shoulders, a gesture of hopelessness. He told Cernik to follow him as he made his way down the steps, around the back of the building and into the rear entrance of European Imports. Once inside, Schmidt went directly to his desk, turned on a dim light and sat in a large hardwood chair.

"You made a big mistake in coming here, Cernik."

"The Americans refused to help me and since my own people don't

want me alive I have no alternative other than to sell my services to Peking. That's where you come in, Schmidt. You have connections. Get me to Peking."

"I don't understand you, Cernik. You are one of their most respected agents. Correction. Were. Then you go and do a foolish thing for money."

"It's easy for you to talk, Schmidt. You sit here in comfort, doing menial little tasks and collecting big rewards. You're not even one of our people. You are German."

"True. I am not one of your people, but I am more loyal than you. Your people are my employers. They have been very good to me. I respect those who deal fairly with me. Their reward for fairness is more than menial little tasks. Their reward is my unfailing loyalty. Now you want to destroy what it has taken me twenty odd years to accomplish."

"I can pay you well," Cernik said.

"Your American friends have tried to buy my services in the past. I refused them just as I'm refusing you. I am loyal, Cernik. Do you understand?"

Cernik was becoming impatient.

"To hell with loyalty. Get me out of Spain, Schmidt. I'm staying right here until you do."

Schmidt opened the top drawer of his desk. His right hand disappeared inside the drawer and it was then that Cernik realized he had

made a mistake in judgement. A split second later, Schmidt was pointing a luger at Cernik's stomach.

"You are a spineless jellyfish. You don't have the guts to kill me, Schmidt."

Cernik didn't believe in what he was saying. There was something in Schmidt's eyes. Desperation perhaps. And a desperate man was a dangerous man.

"I like what I have here in Madrid. It is a good life. And there is my wife and my children and my grandchildren. If I helped you Cernik I stand to lose too much. There are too many ways in which your people could get revenge on me. I am not a violent man, but if I must resort to violence to protect my possessions, then I must."

"Very well," Cernik said. "I will leave."

"I can't allow that," Schmidt said, a coldness in his voice. "They are probably watching me—us. They are probably testing me. I am sorry, Cernik, but I warned you not to come here. I tried to avoid this. Now I must kill you."

Cernik began to say something but the luger's bullet was much too quick.

Back at his office, Regan stood at the window, watching for his associate, Tom Young. He appeared several minutes later, walking quickly through the half light, half dark before dawn. Regan heard his footsteps on the stairs, then the door opened and Young entered.

"I followed Cernik, as you ordered. He went to see Schmidt, as you hoped he would and Schmidt killed him—just as you said he would. Now will you explain why we went through all this trouble, arranging for it to appear to Schmidt that there really was an order to kill Cernik? I just don't understand why we would want Cernik out of the way. Hell, sir, he was selling us information. Why eliminate him?"

"Eliminating him was a necessary evil. He was merely bait for larger game."

"Cernik was one of their finest agents. Who could be larger?"

"Providing a vital organ wasn't damaged, a dagger can easily be removed, the wound treated. Now take a thorn. It's small. Doesn't look very dangerous. But get one in your finger. It gives you a hell of a time removing it. If you don't get it out, it festers and pains and causes all kinds of discomforts."

"I just don't get it, sir."

"All right. Consider this. The enemy places a man in a given city of a given country. They keep him there for twenty odd years. He becomes one of the people, sets up a network of connections. So they pay him well, and if he's a loyal bastard he causes fellas like you and me all kinds of trouble, and because he's loyal he won't be bought. So you have to get rid of him somehow."

"You mean—"

Regan smiled, nodded, then crossed the room to the bureau. A telephone sat atop the bureau. Regan lifted the receiver and dialed a number.

"Paul Schmidt," a voice answered sleepily.

"I'm calling you in regard to a false report you received last night," said Regan calmly. "When your employer discovers you have killed off one of his best agents—Well, you'll need help, Mr. Schmidt and I'm prepared to offer any you may need."



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NOVEMBER—1970

The Balance of Justice

They had taken away his heritage, his name, robbed him of his wife, his freedom, his very home. But there are two things a man never quite loses. His hunger to get free . . . his desire to take his vengeance—in his own way.

by ROBERT COLBY



FOR HARMON WARDLOW it had been a disastrous day. The bank, and even the neighborhood finance company which advertised that they would lend money to "almost anyone," had turned down his

application for a loan. While over at Kessler Properties, a real estate company, Wardlow was suffering a long dry spell as an agent selling on straight commission. More, Chuck Kessler had refused him a second advance.

And at thirty-one, with the house mortgage payment three weeks late, a car payment past due, and bills crowding his mail box at every delivery, Harmon Wardlow was all but broke.

In the late evening of that day, Wardlow was so depressed that he felt the need of liquid solace, ninety proof. But in the contrary way of things a search of the house produced only a few drops of vermouth.

"Wouldn't you know!" Wardlow said disgustedly to his wife. "When your luck is out, even the little things jump up to bug you on all sides. I need a good stiff drink of bourbon and there's not an ounce of anything but vermouth." He scowled at Sharon. "C'mon, let's go into town and have a couple. My nerves're screaming!"

Small, dark-haired and slender, Sharon was twenty-eight. She was a cheerful sort who met defeats with good spirits and hopeful bits of philosophy which in his gloom Harmon found difficult to swallow, if not irritating. But though they had been married only fourteen months, it had so far been very good together.

Sharon glanced at her watch.

"It's pretty late," she answered.

"Going on ten. By the time I get dressed and made up and everything—"

She smiled. "But if it would make you feel better and you don't mind waiting—"

"No," Wardlow said glumly, "It's not worth the effort. I'll hop down to Conley's and grab a fifth before he closes."

Sharon nodded. "Well, whatever you say."

Wardlow pulled on his suit coat over a sport shirt. "Back in a few minutes," he said.

"Please try to cheer up, darling," Sharon told him sweetly. "Remember that like attracts like and a gloomy outlook can only bring us more of the same."

"Yeah, sure," said Wardlow. He kissed her lightly and she turned her attention back to the television. He went out to the car and drove away furiously.

Conley's Liquor Mart was a rather large store which did a brisk business at discount prices. Vince Conley employed a couple of clerks to help him on weekends and in the early evenings. But when Harmon Wardlow entered a few minutes before closing, the store was deserted and Vince was alone. Nearly bald, he was a tall, fortyish man who wore steel rimmed glasses and a mild, studious expression.

Amiable and soft-spoken, he always remembered the name of a steady customer and something

about his business and personal interests.

Glancing up from what appeared to inventory sheets, he made a face which mocked astonishment. "Be damned, Harmon, where you been? I figured you'd gone away on vacation or given up drinking."

"Nope," replied Wardlow with half a smile, "can't afford to do either. Business is that bad."

"I always thought people bought more houses in the spring than any other time," said Vince Conley conversationally.

"Maybe," said Wardlow. "This particular spring everyone's selling, not buying. Same old song. Money is tight."

Conley shook his head in sympathy. "Well," he said, "if money is tight you couldn't tell it from my business. When people're making it big they buy booze to celebrate. And when it's bad they buy the stuff to boost their spirits. So I get 'em comin' and goin'."

"Mmm," said Wardlow, who was gazing about at the bargain displays. "Got any specials on bourbon this week, Vince?"

"Over in the back there," said Conley, pointing. "Second shelf from the bottom. It's bottled under my own label but it's made by one of the best distilleries in Kentucky and you can't beat it. Two other buys in the same section. Take your choice, Harmon. Meantime, I'll close up. It's ten on the button."

Vince Conley was moving to the

door when two more customers entered, young men in loud sports jackets who wanted a quart of vodka. Conley shrugged and locked the door behind them.

Wardlow brought his fifth of bourbon to the counter and reached for his wallet. Conley was about to put the quart of vodka in a bag for the late customers when both young men drew snub-nosed .38s from their jackets.

The shorter man, a stocky redhead whose heavy jaw contained a small scar which loosely described a question mark, told Conley, "You can fill that sack with cash instead, buddy. Both registers, and don't stall around. It makes me nervous."

"Yeah," said the other, who was pointing his gun at Wardlow, "and when we get too nervous, people fall dead. So snap it up!" He was tall and bone thin. A blond man with pale, angular features, he seemed hardly over twenty-one.

Vince Conley didn't say a word. He stared coolly at the two men for what seemed a dangerous interval, then he opened the nearest register and began to load the sack with cash from a well supplied drawer.

When the drawer was cleaned the stocky man said, "Lift it, lift it! Let's get those big bills underneath."

Vince Conley hoisted the drawer and scooped up a handful of twenties and a fifty, tossing them into the brown paper bag. Throughout, his face remained expressionless.

If afraid, Vince Conley was a

man of marvelous self-discipline, thought Wardlow, who was somewhat petrified, though he watched the whole business with a curious feeling of unreality, his mind functioning rapidly on multi-levels of speculation.

He had been buying from Conley for several months, chatting with him all the while about this and that, mostly trivial stuff. But now Wardlow remembered Conley mentioning in his off-hand manner that the store had been robbed twice in the course of less than a year and therefore he had installed a silent alarm system which would summon the police in about three minutes, more or less, depending on the nearness and availability of patrol units.

It occurred to Wardlow that perhaps Conley was calmed by his own secret awareness that he had already given the alarm. The possibility was also frightening because Harmon Wardlow pictured himself caught in the middle of a shootout.

Followed by the stocky man, Conley had gone to the second register and was delivering its currency to the sack. The skinny blond man had remained to guard Wardlow, whom he was eyeing with the first show of interest.

"How about you, George?" the man said. "I'll bet you got a few bucks to contribute, huh?" Like his partner, he spoke with what seemed a New England rasp, unrelieved by any long period of living in a new

environment. "C'mon, let's see some hard green, George."

Wardlow found his wallet and gave up twelve dollars. The man took it with a sneer of disgust.

"You got nerve, George," he said. "They oughta arrest you for vagrancy."

At this precise moment the sound of a shot lashed across the room. Vince Conley had swept a gun from concealment beneath the counter and fired at the chunky redhead, who was sagging to his knees. Money sack in one hand, gun in the other, he was hugging the right side of his chest. Apparently he was not too seriously hurt for he was climbing slowly back to his feet.

Meanwhile, Conley was preparing to shoot the blond man but the latter had stepped behind Wardlow, was clutching him in a strangle hold and using him as a shield. As Vince Conley hesitated, the wounded gunman shot him carefully, the bullet crashing through his forehead above the left eye.

Conley went down in a splash of crimson which obliterated his final expression.

A beat of silence was electrified by a nearly palpable aura of panic. Then the blond man said, "Let's get the hell outta here! C'mon, Pete, you can make it."

To which "Pete" responded by stumbling toward the door, holding the right side of his chest with his forearm, money sack and gun still

in possession, though clutched limply, as if the gunshot man had now forgotten their importance, his attention focused on the pain of his wound.

The blond man had released Wardlow and was studying him intently, as if deliberating the advantage of erasing the only witness. But then he ordered Wardlow to lie flat on the floor behind the counter until they were long gone.

As Wardlow went around the counter and sank prone, he could see the blond man bending over the body of Vince Conley, snatching the gun and dropping it into a pocket. The long neck of the vodka bottle protruded from another pocket of the jacket and as the man scampered away, Wardlow wondered if he had taken it with him at the last second because it contained his fingerprints.

There was then the sound of the door closing and silence.

Harmon Wardlow crawled forward to learn what he had already guessed; that Vince Conley was beyond hope, horribly dead in a widening lake of blood. Just then a siren howled and was echoed by another.

"Which way did they go?" the police would ask, and Wardlow was willing to risk an attempt to have the answer.

He went to the door and bent out, looking cautiously up and down the walk. At the next corner he spied the two gunmen, the taller yanking



the one called Pete along by the arm as he both supported and propelled him. The wounded man stumbled and fell heavily, but his accomplice got him up quickly and they went left into a side street as approaching sirens goaded them to a frenzy of haste. Wardlow raced after them but slowed to take stock at the corner, where the gunshot killer had fallen.

Pausing, his foot struck something metallic and when he looked down he discovered the .38, apparently dropped by the wounded bandit in flight. Beside it was the brown paper bag, the sack of money. He bent and plucked them both from the pavement, then turned the corner.

In that instant he had an evil thought. He had not been able to find a space in front of the store and had rounded the corner to park his car on this very side street.

Suppose he just climbed in and drove off with the desperately needed money which after all he had not personally stolen?

Remembering Vince Conley's blood-drenched body sprawled behind the counter, he dismissed the idea at once. The gun in his hand gave him boldness, a sense of bravado. He walked on at a fast pace, glancing about him.

But the two men had vanished. He wondered if they lurked in the shadows, hiding until the hunt died and they could make their escape. The night was now filled with the whine, yelp and growl of sirens, overriding all other sounds.

In a fragment of his imagination, Wardlow saw himself as the hero who captured the killers and was rewarded with fame and fortune. He hurried on, eyes darting here and there in search of movement. Now as the sirens gave up their tortured cries, he heard the scratch of light quick footsteps behind him and turned abruptly.

The man was almost upon him, looming up in the dark and threatening him with some sort of club poised in the air to crush his skull. Wardlow fired twice wildly in the reflex of fear. As if an improbable nightmare, the man seemed impervious to mere bullets. He never faltered but swung the weapon down over Wardlow's head with terrible force.

At the last second Wardlow ducked. But the blow caught him

on the side of the head just the same, and a darkness much deeper than the night swallowed him whole.

Harmon Wardlow was unconscious for several hours. It was dawn when he came around again. His memory returned swiftly and he was not very surprised when a nurse informed him that he had been brought to the county hospital.

He was shocked indeed however, when he learned that he was confined to a prison ward, charged with suspicion of murder and robbery.

Soon a couple of detectives from Homicide arrived to question him at his bedside. They were quiet, friendly fellows who seemed to believe him. They promised an immediate and thorough investigation on the basis of his detailed account of the crime and his description of the gunmen.

When he asked the two cops why he had been beaten over the head and arrested, he got ready answers. A middle-aged man by the name of Frank Timmons and his wife, Gloria, had arrived across the street from Conley's to buy more liquor for a party in progress at the house of friends. As they drove up and peered at the store between cars parked in front, they saw Wardlow standing in the doorway, furtively glancing up and down the block, then slinking off in a suspicious manner.

"Suspicious, hell" Wardlow said.

"I was only trying to see which way those hoods went."

"That's entirely possible," said Detective Sergeant Ballard, the senior officer of the pair. The sergeant had sharp features and a narrow, slim physique. He looked almost too frail to be a cop. He smiled pleasantly. "We're not here to pass judgment, sir. We just get the facts."

"Okay," said Wardlow. "Just doing your job, no doubt. But this man Timmons sounds like an idiot who went off half-cocked and jumped to conclusions. He the one who clubbed me over the head?"

Wardlow sank back against the pillows propping him up on the hospital bed and touched his banded skull gingerly.

"Clobbered you with a bottle of whisky he spied on the counter," said Ballard's partner, a burly type who would soon be fat if he didn't do some pushups from the table. "Left the wife in the car and dashed across to the store, Timmons did. When he found Conley dead, he grabbed the bottle and took out after you, sneaking up behind.

"Said you whipped around and tried to knock him off with a couple of shots that missed. Then he dove right in and let you have it. Not too bright, maybe. More guts than brains. Yeah, he sure had guts, that Timmons."

"Why, he's a regular hero," said Wardlow. "He's the hero and I'm the bad guy. Is that it?"

Sergeant Ballard and his partner

glanced at each other and exchanged smiles. They were great smilers. Wardlow decided.

"Mr. Wardlow," said Sergeant Ballard earnestly, "when the only man caught at the scene of a robbery-homicide is captured with the murder weapon, a gun we are unable to trace, and the stolen money in his possession, there is plenty of reason to justify the arrest, you'll have to admit."

"I admit nothing of the kind!" Wardlow bellowed. "I've already explained exactly how those two thugs—"

"Yes, I understand," said Ballard with a wave of dismissal. "The next step is for you to identify these suspects. Likely you'll be able to spot them from the mug shots we have on file. Then we'll take them into custody and you'll be released. Mostly routine, Mr. Wardlow, just routine."

Wardlow recovered rapidly and when the medics ascertained that he had sustained no serious injury, he was taken to police headquarters for further interrogation and a look at the mug shots of criminals on file. When, after a long scrutiny of the countless photos, he could not identify either of the culprits, he was lodged in the county jail until the whole matter could be cleared up satisfactorily.

During the designated visiting hours, Sharon came to see him.

"You poor dear!" she exclaimed. "What a frightful mess they've got-

ten you into. For nothing! For being an honest citizen trying to make an arrest."

"Well, this'll teach me," he said. "Next time, if I see a couple of guys setting fire to city hall, I'll walk away without a word. Some justice!"

"I know, I know," replied Sharon, "I understand how you must feel. But try not to be bitter, darling. When the truth is uncovered, you'll be rewarded and you'll be the man of the day, not that Frank Timmons."

"I don't wanna be the man of the day or anything else," Wardlow snapped. "I just want out, that's all!"

"Well," said Sharon hesitantly, "I'm working on it. I've been trying to hire a good lawyer but it's not easy without so much as enough money for a retainer. We may have to take one of those attorneys appointed by the court when a person has no funds for—"

"What're you saying?" Wardlow interrupted. "I don't need a lawyer. Why should I need a lawyer? I'm innocent. It's just a mistake. They're gonna let me go, aren't they?"

"Of course, of course," Sharon answered with a flickering smile. "But it's going to take time and you will need a lawyer."

"There's something you're hiding," Wardlow said grimly.

"Well, I only know what they've told me."

"I see." Wardlow narrowed his

eyes. "Who are 'they' and what have they told you, then?"

"It was a man in the district attorney's office. He said the robbers you described have not been caught or identified.

"Anyway," again Sharon hesitated, "the district attorney feels there is enough evidence for a case against you. He says you are certain to be indicted. There will be a hearing and then a trial. But Harmon, if you don't have faith in legal justice, I believe there is a kind of eternal justice and in the end it will all—"

Wardlow sighed. "I believe in nothing but what I see and know for sure, that I'm in this jail and I'm going on trial for a crime I didn't commit!"

Sharon lowered her head and for the very first time, gave way to tears.

When Wardlow came to trial, he was represented by Jason Daniels, a court appointed attorney who, while young and lacking in the experience of seasoned veterans, had an absolute conviction that his client was innocent.

But Daniels was no match for the prosecutor, who presented a seemingly airtight chain of circumstantial evidence, fortified by testimony that Harmon was nearly bankrupt and had been desperately attempting to borrow money. Failing, argued the assistant district attorney, he had robbed Vincent Con-

ley and then killed him because Conley could identify him.

The most damaging testimony came from Frank and Gloria Timmons, who both declared that they saw no one at the scene of the crime but the defendant, Harmon Wardlow.

A jury of eight men and four women brought in a verdict of guilty.

The penalty imposed was life imprisonment.

"It was an outrageous verdict," said Jason Daniels as two bailiffs were about to lead Wardlow from the courtroom. "But I've never doubted your innocence and I'm going to appeal all the way up to the Supreme Court. Don't give up, Harmon. The battle has only begun!"

At the state prison, where Wardlow was transferred, Sharon was a faithful visitor. On one of these visits she brought word from Daniels that all appeals had been denied.

"I'm not surprised," said Wardlow bitterly. "Daniels meant well but he was incompetent from the start. Well, what can you expect? You pay nothing for a lawyer and you get nothing back."

"Listen, you get the right lawyer and even if you're really guilty, they're gonna set you free. That's the system. There is no justice and there never was. Money buys it all. And a poor man is a dead duck until the day he dies."

"Yes," Sharon said. "That's the

way it seems. And even though you're in there and I'm out here, I'm hard put not to agree. I won't try to tell you how lonely and lost I feel because that's not important now."

"But I still do have hope. Silly as it may sound to you under the circumstances, darling, I do have a kind of spiritual conviction that there is a law of compensation and retribution that balances the score if you hold out long enough to see it work."

Wardlow snorted. "You're talking in riddles. Spell it out. What do you mean, compensation and retribution?"

"In simple language, I mean that one day you'll be compensated, rewarded for suffering unjustly. And on the other hand, the killers who should be in your place will be punished."

Wardlow shook his head. "Sharon, that kind of stuff is for children. And if I was still a child before all this happened, I grew up over night. I'm gonna get compensation all right, and maybe retribution in the bargain. In my own way, in my own time. Don't you worry, sweetheart."

Sharon only smiled a sad little smile and abruptly changed the subject.

"On the more practical side," she said, "no matter what happens, a life sentence doesn't mean you'll be in for life. Daniels told me that since you have no previous record, with good behavior you'll be eligible for

parole when you've served eight years."

"Only eight years," he said with frigid eyes. "Why hell, as the old-time cons used to say, I can do that standing on my head."

When Harmon Wardlow was released from prison after serving time for a crime he did not commit, he was thirty-nine, really at the very edge of forty. His house had been sold, his car had been repossessed and he could not hold a real estate license as an ex-con with a felony conviction.

About the only good thing left to him in life was his wife, Sharon, who had remained loyal throughout, endlessly seeking his vindication while working as a secretary in the office of Kessler Properties.

Out of compassion, Chuck Kessler had given Sharon a job and now he had created a temporary place for Harmon in the office, where he would perform minor functions having nothing to do with sales or legal transactions. Kessler told Wardlow that in truth there was no real need of his services and that he would be required to make only a token appearance at the office to satisfy the conditions of his parole. Meanwhile, he was to hunt for a permanent position.

Sharon had been living in a small apartment which she had dressed up attractively for her husband's return. On the very first evening she prepared an extravagant dinner in celebration. Before serving it in

candlelight she opened a bottle of champagne and offered a toast to the future.

"Forget the past," she said. "Don't ever think of it again. The future will take care of itself. The scales of eternal justice will never cheat anyone and in time everything will balance."

"I know," said Wardlow, who while making an effort to be sociable, was mostly withdrawn and pensive. "I know what you mean. The old law of compensation and retribution, huh?"

"That's right!" said Sharon with a chuckle. "I see you remembered."

"I remembered," replied Wardlow quietly. And sent her an odd little smile.

In the morning Wardlow made his token appearance at Kessler Properties. He left in about an hour but did not look for another job, had no intention of doing so. Instead he took a portion of the savings Sharon had put aside to give him on his return from prison, and bought a modest, second-hand car. In the afternoon he drove out to the race track and for once made a small bundle on the ponies.

Leaving the track, he made note of a curious detail which caused him to remember the grinding years in prison during which there was little to do but scheme and dream, unfolding the cynical philosophy he had adopted to that willing listener, Ben Stokely. Stokely was a good companion. Easy-going and friendly,

he had a cunning intelligence. He hated all forms of work and loved fast money, often taken at the point of a gun.

There was a time when Wardlow would have loathed Stokely and his ruthless way of life. But when injustice had made him an enemy of the Establishment, Wardlow couldn't find a better friend and ally than Ben Stokely, who had departed prison a month earlier on parole from a first conviction for armed robbery.

In the evening Wardlow went to a booth and called Stokely at a number Ben had left with him the day before Stokely was released.

"Meet me at the track on Saturday," he told Stokely. "I'll be at the paddock rail ten minutes before the first race. And Ben, bring some hardware for both of us. I'll give you the scoop when I see you."

They were walking away from the paddock enclosure when Stokely said, "I'd about given you up. What's on your mind?"

"Same thing that was always on my mind. One giant haul, just one. Enough to coast to the end of the line without lifting a finger."

"That's for me," Stokely replied. "I've been casing that bank I told you about. Got a better idea?"

"Yeah, you bet. Let's find some corner where we can talk."

After the last race they hung about with those who remained to cash winning tickets. They were still on hand when the armored



truck pulled up near a side gate and the guards came in to pick up the big Saturday take.

"We could hide and stick them up as they leave," Wardlow murmured. "It's been done before." He had brought a couple of masks and was wound tight with excitement.

"I still say you're outta your mind," Ben Stokely low-voiced from a corner of his mouth. "You got the track security cops crawling all over the place like an armed fort. Then you got the maintenance crew and God knows how many other flunkies around. Just plain suicide. You have a lot to learn if you wanna stay alive in this game, pal."

"The only chance to heist that baby is somewhere nice and quiet after it leaves the track. We'll lay low somewhere outside and then we'll follow and see where it goes. C'mon!"

As it developed, the truck made three stops enroute to the garage. The last stop, after dark, was a supermarket which, though still lighted, was apparently closed. The truck parked in the lot behind the market and even from the street where the guards were invisible, it was obvious that they entered by a rear door.

"Now if I was gonna take the gamble," said Stokely thoughtfully, "this would be the spot for the job."

"Let's do it now while we've got up steam," said Wardlow.

"It takes more than steam," Stokely answered. "We need a solid plan and the timing has to be just right. We should be already parked behind the store in a stolen heap they can't trace. The guards'll think the car belongs to one of the food jockeys inside. No, we'll wait until next Saturday. Meantime, I'll figure it right down to the last move."

On Friday Ben Stokely swiped a late model sedan of a drab color, small and inconspicuous. Saturday afternoon before the store closed, they parked the car in a spot next to the rear entrance. At first darkness Stokely climbed in front, Wardlow in back. Guns in gloved hands, both hugged the floorboards, waiting in concealment.

Cars could be heard coming and going, but at last silence settled around them and after what seemed an aching eternity, there was the heavy rumble of a truck. Stokely

lifted his head cautiously and ducked down again.

"The moment of truth," he said softly. "It's here! Pull on your mask."

They heard the truck door bang, the fading shuffle of footsteps as two of the three guards entered the store.

Ben Stokely took another fast look.

"Now!" he whispered, and opened his door. They crawled out on the far side. Masks fixed in place, .38s poised, they hunched down, screened from view by the car.

Old pro that he was, Stokely had positioned the stolen car so close to the market exit, the guards could not avoid passing almost near enough to reach out and touch it.

Time crept in a sweating drag of seconds which became minutes. Wardlow was coiled in knots of fear. Afraid to draw a deep breath, he crouched in place like a runner on the mark.

Abruptly the door swung open and the guards appeared. They were young and lithe and moved with a casual grace, chatting easily, not in the least concerned or defensive. Last stop of the day, purely routine. Just a few thousand in cash and a wad of checks in the white-cloth sack toated by one of the guards, the other resting a lazy hand on the butt of his holstered pistol.

Wardlow tightened his grip on the .38. Suddenly Stokely jabbed his arm—the signal. They sprang

up and darted toward the guards, toeing behind them on sneakered feet. One of the guards turned at the last instant and reached for his gun.

"Freeze or die!" Ben Stokely growled, his voice clear but muted.

With only a beat of indecision, the guard dropped his hand loosely to his side. His partner, the one with the sack, stood rooted. Wardlow had poked a gun in the center of his back.

Stokely lifted the weapons from the holsters of the guards and stuck one in each of his hip pockets. The whole play had taken only seconds.

Stokely kept tossing nervous glances at the truck, parked broadside to them just beyond. In the darkness, the driver was invisible behind the wheel. Apparently he had not seen the action. Even so, he couldn't shoot his own men, who were targets in front of Stokely and Wardlow.

"Now move up with your keys and open that cab door," Stokely ordered. "Play it smart and don't tip the driver or we'll hafta shoot holes in his skull."

"You'll never get away with it," said one of the guards.

"You'll never live to know if you don't get the lead out," Stokely answered him smoothly.

The next phase went off precisely as planned. Stooping low behind their prisoners, they advanced to the truck. When one of the guards

opened the cab door, the driver sized up the impossible odds against him and reluctantly forked over his gun.

Once the rear compartment had been unlocked the captive guards were herded inside and forced to hand the bloated sacks of money out to Wardlow, who hustled them to the getaway car.

Harmon Wardlow was loading the last of the money bags into the trunk when he was startled by a sound behind him. A box boy had come out to the lot with some empty cartons for the waste bin. These in hand, he now stood gaping at the masked man before him.

Wardlow showed him the gun as he closed the trunk lid on the sacks.

"C'mere, kid," he said quite gently. "You won't get hurt. I'm just gonna keep you in sight until we shove off."

But the boy let go of the cartons and ran toward the store. Wardlow couldn't shoot the kid and watched helplessly as he disappeared inside. Then he raced for the truck and explained to Stokely in a gush of words.

"Cops'll be here in a couple of minutes," said Stokely. "Let's roll!"

He turned back to the guards just in time to see one of them reach swiftly for something out of sight. It was a riot gun bracketed on the wall of the compartment.

"Drop it!" Stokely snarled.

"That's it, that's a good boy. ...ok click it outside."

Stokely scooped the gun from the pavement and slammed the compartment door. Then he loped toward the getaway car with Wardlow just behind. A man could be seen peering warily from the glass doors of the market as they scrambled in and stormed away.

They were a good mile removed on a darkened side street, transferring the sacks to Wardlow's car when they heard the first distant siren. Ben Stokely chuckled.

"Read all about it, read all about it, folks," he cried. As they gunned off to his apartment for the split, he began to stuff the currency into when themedics ascertained that he purpose.

Half an hour later they were dividing the spoils, cutting down the middle a sum close to two hundred and eighty thousand. When he left with his half in one of the cases, Wardlow shook hands with Stokely and said that for him, this was the end of it. The end of crime and their last meeting.

"I just wanted the system to pay off for what it did to me," Harmon Wardlow told Ben Stokely in parting. "It isn't so much the money, it's a kind of revenge I had to take so I could bear living."

Next morning they were headline news, masked gunmen who escaped without leaving a clue. Wardlow put the money in a safety deposit box under an assumed name, after



which some six weeks passed without event. Then he got a dreadful scare. His old Nemesis, Detective Ballard, now raised to the rank of lieutenant, phoned and asked him to come to the station on a matter of prime importance.

He knew it was a trap. They had some tiny scrap of evidence, not enough to arrest him. And they hoped to force a confession. Still, there was little choice, he had to fake it through or run.

But the lieutenant was friendly. Perhaps too friendly. Ballard only wanted Wardlow to take a look at some mug shots.

"What's it all about?" asked Wardlow as he lighted a cigarette to cover his anxiety.

"You'll know soon enough," Ballard answered with a whisp of smile. "Now sit down at that desk and go right ahead, sir. Take your time." The lieutenant folded into a

battered chair behind a newspaper.

At first Wardlow figured they had seen him with Ben Stokely and Stokely was a suspect in the armored truck robbery. Stokely's photo would be in the book and Ballard wanted to see if he would pass it by or react to it in a manner that would reveal his guilt.

But after only a few minutes of checking the stark collection of unhappy faces he found one that rang a distant bell. And then the whole point of his summons to police headquarters became beautifully clear. His relief was enormous.

"This one!" he cried, and stabbed a finger at the photo as Ballard bent over his shoulder. "This," declared Harmon Wardlow excitedly, "is the guy who killed Vince Conley. I did eight years for that creep!"

"Are you positive?" asked the lieutenant with a poker face.

"Yeah, that's the man. See that little scar like a question mark on his chin? Just the way I described him years ago. He'll have another scar, right side of his chest where Conley's bullet winged him. And he's got red hair, though you can't see it in this black and white."

The lieutenant beamed. "That's Pete Loder. Killed one of our patrolmen attempting to escape after a bank holdup. He knew he was doomed, so he confessed to a whole string of robberies, Conley's included. He admits shooting Conley.

"His accomplice, Randy Gillis is doing time on another charge in his home state of Massachusetts. When Loder spilled the beans, Gillis had to confess too. The liquor store was one of their first jobs, before they had a record."

"If you got their confession, why did you need me?" said Warlow.

"Just a formality. A little extra insurance, you might say."

Wardlow cocked his head and stared malevolently at Lieutenant Ballard who said, "I'll bet I can guess what you're thinking?"

Harmon Wardlow laughed harshly. "Not a chance. I doubt if you could even come close."

After a moment Ballard said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Wardlow. I can't tell you how sorry I am. That goes for all of us."

"Sorry, huh? Oh, that really warms my heart" Wardlow sneered. "Well 'sorry' won't help me now. You're just a bit too late, Lieutenant."

After, when he told Sharon, she said joyfully, "Now, you see! If you just wait long enough—"

"The law of compensation and retribution will balance the scales," Harmon finished with a tight smile.

The next day, Jason Daniels was on the phone.

"We'll file suit for half a million in punitive and other damages!" he howled. "It'll never get to court. They'll settle first for enough to keep you the rest of your life if you

invest properly. Just let me handle it!"

Then the reporters and photographers came, and they made a big fuss. Harmon Wardlow was seated beside Sharon in their living room when one of the reporters said, "Mr. Wardlow, we understand there will be no opposition to a huge settlement in your favor. Would you give us a statement as to your reaction? Will the money satisfy you? Will you forgive and forget? Or will you hold bitterness toward a system which sent you to prison for a crime you didn't commit?"

"Well," said Wardlow, "it should be obvious that no amount of money could buy eight years of a man's life under prison conditions, not to mention public accusations, a court trial, and so on. No, I'll never forget, and it's not easy to forgive."

He glanced at Sharon, who with slightly parted lips, waited expectantly for him to continue. "But I do believe there is a—a universal

force working behind the scenes for all of us. A law of compensation and retribution that balances the scales of justice regardless of human error."

The reporter nodded.

"Hopefully, that's true," he said. "But when you've been compensated, at least in terms of money, will you always remain unsatisfied that justice has been balanced?"

Harmon Wardlow smiled a secret smile and lighting a cigarette, sat back comfortably. He was thinking then about the armored truck robbery. When the settlement came he would be able to spend the loot from the holdup with discretion, using the settlement as a screen for his grand style of living.

"That's a tough question," Wardlow told the reporter. "The law made a big mistake. But maybe someday I'll make one too. And eternal justice will look the other way . . . Who knows? Only time will tell."

Complete in the Next Issue—

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NOWHERE IN THE annals of American criminal history has a churning maelstrom of big city corruption been so viciously exploded than in the time of Kansas City's Tom Pendergast, the man some say helped make Harry S. Truman President of the United States.

Pendergast wound up in prison and came out a broken man. Prior to that he was the boss of Missouri and a powerful figure in national politics.

How could a man with connections which ran all the way to the United States Senate and the White House embroil himself with hoodlums and gangsters, crime and murder, and hazard a political life and

future which brought him honor and wealth?

To this day the legend persists that Tom Pendergast was a friend of the poor, a man of incorruptible honor, and a victim of legal persecution. This opinion still is held by many men who were holders of the highest public offices.

Here is the true story of Tom Pendergast and Kansas City, unvarnished, exact in every detail, and devoid of all fiction.

In 1933, Kansas City, Missouri belonged to Johnny Lazia, who was the right hand of Boss Tom Pendergast. Singapore, Algiers, Port Said and Paris had nothing on Kansas City when it came to vice, crime, and murder. The red light district

He had friends in high places, power beyond belief—and Boss Pendergast parleyed them into a cesspool of corruption and murder that made Kansas City the crime capitol of the land. Murderers did his bidding, killers plied their trade in safety—this was indeed the crime hellhole of all!



on 14th Street ran openly. The whores walked the streets, posed in the doorways or windows of the ramshackle flats, and either called to prospective customers or tried to attract their attention by tapping on windows with coins.

Gambling joints ran in the same wide-open fashion, and these were as crooked as corkscrews. If a citizen complained to the police that he had been cheated in a gambling joint he was locked up as a drunk and charged with disturbing the peace. No one on the police force wanted to buck the gambling syndicate because Johnny Lazia was at the head of it, and Lazia made appointments to the police department!

If a criminal was hot he made his way to Kansas City and Johnny Lazia, and at Lazia's word no one bothered the fugitive. You could reach into the FBI files for the names of every wanted man of the time and you could be certain that he had been hidden out while he was hot by Johnny Lazia. And the term "hidden out" is a misnomer because the fugitive walked the streets as if he owned them.

In 1933, Charles Gargotta, a Lazia henchman, shot and killed a hood named Ferris Anthon in the presence of Sheriff Thomas B. Bash, just one of the few thoroughly honest police officials.

Sheriff Bash arrested Gargotta, seized his guns, marked them for evidence, and Gargotta was summarily charged with first degree

murder. Never was a case better prepared, never was there a more clear cut case of premeditated murder.

But Johnny Lazia took care of all that and Charles Gargotta walked out of court a free man. To understand how this could have happened it is pointed out here that at the time there were some seventy-five ex-cons on the police payroll and it was estimated that at least one-tenth of all the police personnel had criminal records.

The Reno Club, the Chesterfield Club, and other similar dives featured gambling, booze, and girls. The waitresses moved from table to table wearing high heels and cheap perfume and nothing else, not even a G-string.

The customers included such illustrious characters as Hymie the Pig, Bugsy Siegel, Charlie Luciano, Abe Reles, Chicago and New York hoods, and Verne Miller, a notorious bank robber.

Hard Luck Charlie Haughton, Lazia's lieutenant, Big Solly Weissman and Gold Tooth Maxie, all Lazia henchmen, represented the local talent. Hoods wandered in and out of Kansas City like locusts, all of them under the protection of Lazia and with, of course, the blessing of Pendergast.

This was the situation in Kansas City in 1933, when a completely isolated event took place in Hot Springs, Arkansas. It was this event which shook up Kansas City, re-

sulted in the murder of Johnny Lazia, brought the glare of the national spotlight on Boss Tom Pendergast, exposed his crooked political machine, sent him to prison, and triggered one of the bloodiest chapters in American underworld history.

Three years previously, on October 9, 1930, Frank "Jelly" Nash, a notorious bank robber, had escaped from the federal prison at Leavenworth. He made his way to Chicago, teamed up with the Ma Barker gang and other hoods, heisted a dozen banks and then hid out in Hot Springs under the protection of Dick Galatas, who was as powerful in Hot Springs as Lazia was in Kansas City.

Nash was hotter than a two-dollar pistol and was on the FBI's *Ten Most Wanted* list. He was hunted zealously by teams of FBI agents.

On this day, on June 16, 1933, two FBI agents, F. J. Lackey and Frank Smith, walked into Galatas' White Front Pool Hall, a combination bookie joint and gambling hall, spotted Nash and confronted him.

"You're under arrest, Nash," Lackey told him.

"Who the hell are you?" Nash challenged.

"We're special agents of the FBI," Lackey answered, and showed Nash his credentials. "Let's go, Nash. The ball game is over."

"I'm not going anywhere," Nash retorted. "Those credentials look phoney as hell to me. And so do you guys."



PRETTY BOY FLOYD

Lackey reached out to take hold of Nash's lapels but Nash slugged him. Lackey slugged back, several vicious punches to Nash's mid-section, and then Smith hit him with a couple of solid shots to the jaw. While Nash was dazed the two FBI agents slipped the cuffs on his wrists and hustled him out the door, threw him into the back seat of their car and sped away.

Dick Galatas went into action as soon as the trio were out the door. He called Frances Nash, Frank's wife, whom Nash married while he was on the lam in Chicago.

Frances had been a dice girl in a Chicago tavern. She hurried over to Galatas' house and there the two went into swift conference. Dick

Galatas decided to call "Dutch" Akers, chief of detectives of Hot Springs.

"Dutch" Akers was a wise cop, which is to say that he was a good cop when he had to be, when it didn't concern someone who was paying off to him. He knew whose money to take and how much. He was willing to give the proper service for payment received, and he didn't double-cross anyone. That made him a wise cop until the blow fell, and then he was a lousy cop and a dim-wit. That's the way it is with crooked cops.

Akers listened to Galatas. "I'll see what I can do. But this sounds like a real tough one."

"We've got to stop those agents before they reach Leavenworth," Galatas said. "Once they get Nash behind bars it will be too late."

"You've got to help us," Frances implored him.

"I'll see what I can do," Akers promised. "Meanwhile, you do what you can."

Smith and Lackey had picked up Chief of Police Otto Reed of McAlester, Oklahoma, as a reinforcement, and the three, together with Nash, reached Benton, Arkansas. Their car was stopped by Benton police officers who approached them with guns drawn.

"We've received word a man has been kidnaped in Hot Springs," one of the police officers said. "What about it? Who are you guys?"

"That's right!" Nash yelled from

the back seat of the car. "I am being snatched. They want to kill me! Get me outta here!"

Lackey said, "That man is an escaped convict from the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth and is wanted for a dozen bank jobs. We're taking him back to prison." Lackey showed the officers his credentials, as did Smith and Police Chief Reed.

"You got a tough customer there," the other officer said. "I remember seeing a wanted poster on him. He was mixed up with the Barker gang. Okay, boys, go ahead. We're satisfied."

The very same thing happened in Little Rock, Arkansas. At Fort Smith, Lackey, Smith, and Reed held a conference. They phoned the FBI office in Kansas City and explained what had happened.

The FBI agent in Kansas City said, "Put your man aboard the Missouri Pacific train at Fort Smith for Kansas City. We'll have some men waiting to assist you when you arrive. Be very careful from here on because its obvious the mob is trying to free your prisoner. Don't take any chances with him at all."

Galatas all this time had been busier than a one-legged cat chasing a mouse. He called Chicago, Joplin, Missouri, and Kansas City. The people he contacted got busy and the underworld wires burned as plans to rescue Nash from his captors were made. The frenzied attempts to free Nash were all out of proportion to his importance.

He was just a good bank robber. However, he had become a link in a chain which now stretched from Hot Springs to Kansas City to Chicago, and the men who had agreed to help were important and could get things done, and that was the extent of Nash's influence, forged by the fact of Galatas' intervention. The hoods who had agreed to help had close contacts with people in high places, in politics, in police departments, in an underworld circle which encompassed the sphere of influence contained in the men who took crooked dollars and were willing to close their eyes to any and all underworld mischief.

At this time, too, Tom Pendergast called in Johnny Lazia for a short and pointed talk.

"Johnny, I'm a little concerned about the way things are going. There are too many hot characters in town, too many of them wanted by police of other cities and by the FBI. I want you to clear the city of every out-of-town hood and character in the next forty-eight hours. Pass the word along. If they aren't out of town by then I want them picked up and thrown into jail. No excuses, Johnny. That's an order."

This order by Pendergast was not motivated by a sense of civic pride or responsibility or rather by self-interest and a desire to avoid unnecessary trouble for himself. He sensed that things were getting out of hand and he wanted to stop it before it got out of control.

In the main Pendergast was a ruthless, shrewd, and powerful machine boss who had few equals and no superiors. In many ways he was a tyrant, and in many ways he was a genius at political machinations. His orders to Lazia to clear the city of wanted and out-of-town hoods was an instance of that genius.

He seemed to have an extremely highly developed sixth sense for things that weren't going right. He had it for people too. He turned down many men who sought his help in advancing their political careers and could offer no other reason than that he "felt they weren't right for the office."

Although Tom Pendergast was as flamboyant a politician as ever lived, his office at 1908 Main Street, in the business section of Kansas City, was about as unpretentious a place as one could find. The furnishings included an old-fashioned roll top desk, hard wooden chairs, the floor of hard wood and carpetless.

Pendergast sat behind his desk from the moment he came into the office until he left for the day, always with his hat on, and had his visitors ushered in by a big six-foot, ex-river boat captain named Elijah Matheus.

His visitors included everyone from ordinary laborers, parents who needed his help to get a son out of trouble, a job for the father, or other help, to judges, state sena-

tors, district attorneys, and other big-wigs.

He made it a point to see as many people as possible during the day. He also kept close touch with precinct captains, because he wanted to know what was going on in every precinct of the city, and in each county in Missouri. He was *The Boss*, and as such required constant information about everything and everyone in politics. He was as watchful against a double-cross as any gang boss and it may be said truthfully that his political machine was as vicious a criminal conspiracy as was that of Murder, Inc., the Capone Syndicate, Lucky Luciano's vice and narcotics empire, or the current Mafia's stranglehold on all underworld activities.

There was a legendary brevity to all his interviews, regardless of who the caller may have been. He had no time for idle talk, the weather, baseball, horses, or anything but the business at hand. His deep grey eyes, forever unwavering, never left the face of his visitor. He seemed not only to be listening to what was being said but penetrating the thoughts of the speaker as well.

Michael and Mary Pendergast were natives of Tipperary, Ireland, and first settled in Gallipolis, Ohio. Their first son, Jim, was born to them in 1856. A year later they moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, and there, in a frame house on July 22, 1872, Thomas Joseph Pendergast

was born. The frame house on Frederick Street, a short distance from 1318 Lafayette, Street, where Jesse James was killed, was torn down in October 1946 by Lee Van Vickle, a dealer in monuments or gravestones.

It was just as well, It could have never stood up as a shrine. However, Jesse James and Tom Pendergast do have something in common even to this day. Both are depicted prominently in the controversial mural by Thomas Hart Benton in the State Capitol at Jefferson City, Missouri. And why not?

If Thomas Joseph Pendergast did not carry a gun in the manner of Jesse James, he raided Missouri as surely as did Jesse James. A former saloon keeper, big Tom Pendergast, ruddy of face, with the neck of a bull and weighing two-hundred and fifty pounds, bathed Kansas City in blood.

Pendergast rose from saloon keeper to ward heeler, and went up the ladder step by step until he became the boss of Kansas City and then political boss of Missouri. His armed hoods and thugs cruised the city in automobiles bearing no license plates and beat citizens who would not vote Pendergast's way. He tolerated every vice known to man, not only tolerated it but encouraged it because from every form of vice he permitted to run freely came the revenues that helped him build his political machine. And into this picture came Johnny Lazia,

a gift from the gods for Pendergast.

Lazia was a weak-eyed egomaniac, an ex-convict, a constant gum-chewer, an erratic, unstable bum whose education was limited to several grades below that of his boss who achieved what would be equivalent to the ninth or tenth grade in high school today — although Pendergast always claimed he had attended St. Mary's College in St. Mary's, Kansas. A thorough search of college records have not there, not in any printed catalog or revealed a single trace of his stay registration book.

Like Pendergast, Johnny Lazia got his start in the Italian first ward. An Irishman named Michael Ross took over the first ward in 1920. Lazia, an Italian and a product of the North Side, quickly deposed him by kidnaping all of Ross' lieutenants during an election that was won by a Pendergast candidate.

That was the beginning for Lazia as Pendergast's chief lieutenant. The north side housed about thirty-five per cent residents of Sicilian descent. The mistaken thought that all Sicilians are members of the Mafia was proved untrue in Kansas City's Little Italy section. The majority of the families were law-abiding, paid their bills, minded their own business, sent their children to parochial schools and to mass. Most of them lived in unpainted houses that were dull and covered with soot, but the people themselves were cheerful,



ADAM RICHETTI

drank their wine, sang their songs, and played their music.

Pendergast, to his credit never wanted to change this. Lazia did. He sucked a great many of the families dry, forcing them to contribute to one fund or another, the money going into his pockets. This was Johnny Lazia.

THE VERY SAME morning that Frank "Jelly" Nash was picked up in Hot Springs by Agents Smith and Lackey, Sheriff Jack Killingsworth of Bolivar, Missouri, was in a public garage when he encountered two of the most notorious bank robbers and killers operating in the country at the time. They were Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd and Adam Richetti. Both men were wanted in

half a dozen states for robbery and murder.

"Pretty Boy" was so named by a two-buck whore on Fourteenth Street in Kansas City. He wasn't pretty. He had a hard, cruel face and the cold eyes of a shark. His record was replete with savagery. In 1925, he was sentenced to serve five years in the Missouri State Prison for highway robbery, the same charge for which Lazia served his term.

After Floyd did this stretch he committed robberies in Kansas City, Kansas, was arrested and released for lack of evidence. He then did a short bit in the jail at Pueblo, Colorado, and shortly after his release he pulled a bank heist in Toledo, Ohio, and drew a ten to twenty-five year sentence in the Ohio State Penitentiary.

While he was being transported to prison he overpowered his guards and escaped. He was a hot fugitive again, for the fifth or sixth time in his short life, and this time he met Adam Richetti, who also was a hot package.

Richetti pulled a heist in Crown Point, Indiana, was tried and convicted and did time for the job. After he got out he stuck up a bank in Oklahoma, jumped bail and became a hunted but elusive fugitive.

When Richetti and Floyd became partners they made the Cookson Hills in Oklahoma their hideout, as modern Robin Hoods, especially and a legend grew up about Floyd,

who had helped several poor families with money.

Robin Hood or not, Floyd was a cold-blooded killer if you got in his way. He killed two brothers, Bill and Wallace Ash in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1931, for no more reason than he was in love with the wife of Bill Ash. He shot a cop named Ralph Castner, who tried to stop him in Bowling Green, Ohio. He was accused of murdering a Federal prohibition agent named Curtis C. Burks in Kansas City, Missouri, and an innocent bystander who got in the way. There was also the murder of Deputy Sheriff Irwin Kelley near Pacific, Oklahoma, and a few others.

Sheriff Jack Killingsworth took a long look at "Pretty Boy" Floyd and Adam Richetti and was about to pull his gun when Floyd and Richetti beat him to the draw, overpowered him, marched him out of the garage, put him in his car and made him drive them out of town.

The car broke down and Floyd held up a salesman and forced him to drive the party to Kansas City. There Floyd released the sheriff and the salesman on a lonely side-road. They never knew until later how lucky they had been to leave alive.

Floyd and Richetti were now hotter than ever before and their arrest was imminent because they were known to be in the vicinity. Floyd called several contacts and was told to get in touch with Johnny Lazia.

"This is Pretty Boy Floyd, Johnny. I've got Adam Richetti with me. me. We're real hot." He explained the circumstances to him.

"Okay," Lazia replied. "Don't worry about it. You go to this address and tell Joe I sent you. You'll be safe there. I'll let you know when you can start to move around."

Such was Lazia's power as boss of the Italian first ward that he could offer two of the most wanted men in the country immunity from arrest in one of the largest metropolitan cities in the nation.

It was to prove his downfall, however. The terrible events that led up to the Kansas City Massacre were beginning to take shape, all the accidental events were being forged into the chain that was to prove the noose around Lazia's neck and bind Tom Pendergast to an ignominious fate.

The crime proved to be as vicious as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago. It was all set. The decline of the last vestige of decency in Kansas City was about to take place.

At seven o'clock in the morning on that fateful June 17, the Missouri Pacific train pulled into the Union Station in Kansas City. It was a warm, clear day, tinted with sunshine. The spacious plaza outside the station was a scene of lazy activity as crowds moved toward the entrances. There were smiles on the faces of the men and women, and some of them laughed lightly as

they spoke to each other. Many of these were vacationers, looking ahead to a week or two of relaxation and fun.

None of them envisioned the guttural rise of violence that was to sweep across the plaza in the next few minutes, and none of them believed a scene of such maddening slaughter was possible outside a field of battle in a war between nations. Yet it was to come, swiftly, without warning, and it was to shock as killing in the streets never shocked before.

The Missouri Pacific, carrying Frank "Jelly" Nash, Chief of Police Otto Reed, and Special Agents F. J. Lackey and Frank Smith, was met by Special Agent Raymond Caffrey and two Kansas City plain clothes cops, W. J. Grooms and Frank Hermanson. In a car outside the station waited two more special agents of the FBI. These were the reinforcements promised Lackey and Smith. The group moved through the crowded station toward the east exit, where Caffrey had parked his car.

In front of Caffrey's car the special agent said. "All right, Nash. Get into the front seat."

The manacled Nash looked around the street, a vague hope in his eyes. Nash got into the front seat, and then Chief Reed and two FBI Agents climbed into the rear seat. Grooms and Hermanson and another agent were standing beside the car while Caffrey walked around

the automobile and put his hand on the handle of the door on the driver's side. He opened the door and prepared to slide under the wheel.

And then it happened, and the light, shape, and tone of the morning was suddenly shattered, ripped apart by the distant roar of savage violence.

Three men, two of them armed with machine guns and the other with pistols, approached the car, and one of them shouted: "Up! Up! Get 'em up! All you coppers, up with your hands!"

The crowds in the plaza hurrying toward the entrances to the Union Station, and those coming out of it, had not yet become aware of what was about to happen.

Nash turned his head and looked at the men with the machine guns. For a fleeting instant a look of hope flashed in his eyes, and at the same time Detective W. J. Grooms swung his gun up and around and fired. The slug hit one of the men holding a machine gun, but only in the shoulder, and he cursed.

"You lousy son!" the wounded gunman swore. "Let the bastards have it! Kill 'em! Kill 'em!"

"Don't shoot!" Nash yelled. Don't shoot!"

His warning words came too late, and the slow, grey ash of time and death, the payment in the coin of the realm, came to him with panic-driven swiftness. Slug after slug hit

him and he fell over the steering wheel.

The machine guns moved to and fro, and the man with the pistols fired too, and the crowds in the plaza stopped and turned their heads and looked, and the horror was in their eyes and on their faces. They saw Detectives Hermanson and Grooms fall, and Special Agent Raymond J. Caffrey, and they saw the blood spurt from their bodies. A woman screamed hysterically, and another fainted, and then another woman fainted and a man caught her as she fell and began to shout for help.

There were more shots, and then a brief pause, a death-like moment of silence, and one of the gunmen spoke, calmly, as if he were inspecting a coat he intended to buy, and his words were harsh and sullen and filled with sickness.

"They're all dead," he said. "Come on. Let's go."

The three gunmen hurried to their car, got in and sped away. It was all over in less than a minute, sixty seconds of timelessness for five men —Chief of Police Otto Reed, Officers Grooms and Hermanson, Agent Raymond J. Caffrey, and Frank "Jelly" Nash.

Pandemonium was a living thing in the area where the five men lay dead. The news of the killings in the plaza of the Union Station was headlined in the newspapers all over the country as quickly as special editions could be gotten out, and a

nation read and wondered how such a thing could happen, in a public square, in broad daylight.

Boss Tom Pendergast called in Johnny Lazia.

"I want to know the name of everyone who was involved in this mess!" he shouted, and pounded the desk with a heavy fist. "I told you to get every damned stray hood out of this town! I told you to clean it up! How the hell could you let a thing like this happen? We're gonna be skinned alive for this unless we turn up the bastards who did the killings. Find them! Turn them in! You know who they are?"

Lazia shook his head. Pendergast didn't believe him.

"Johnny," Pendergast shouted, and rose from his chair, "I made you a rich man. A powerful man. Unless you come up with the names of the men who did this thing I'll break you, you understand? I'll break you and put your ass in prison! Now get out and come back with the information I want. This morning!"

After Lazia left, Pendergast received a call from a detective in police headquarters.

"Tom, this is a dirty piece of business that we can't handle. The Feds are in on this and the town will be swarming with Agents before I hang up. We have to make some arrests. The right guys who did this. Any answers?"

"No, but I'm going to get them



or I'm going to have a lot of asses over a barrel."

"Okay, Tom. I just wanted you to know that the heat is on and it's strong enough to burn us all to a crisp."

"I know, I know," Pendergast replied angrily. "Leave it to me. I'll have the dirty bastards before the day is over!"

Pendergast was wrong on two counts. Lazia would not go to prison. And the heat that was on the town was to burn him to a dirty brown and break him for all time.

Despite Johnny Lazia, who would not turn in the men who did the killings, names began to come into the office of the FBI in Kansas City, names that were searched out, dug out, hammered out. Herbie Farmer of Joplin. "Doc" Stacey of Chicago, owner of the O.P. Inn; Verne Miller, gunman, bank robber and professional

killer. Agents began checking the men out, gathering information on them, tying them in with one man after another until they were tied to each other and the picture began to take a little form.

Herbie Farmer was an old buddy of Frank Nash, had once served a stretch with him. Farmer also knew Verne Miller. Verne Miller had done business with Stacey in Chicago. Stacey had financed bank jobs and jewel robberies, loaned money to hoods who were temporarily out of funds. Stacey was fairly well connected with the Chicago Syndicate and with Johnny Lazia. Not a clear cut picture yet, but very evident in outline.

Word then came that the massacre had been committed by hoods from out of town, professional killers. No names. Just "outside talent."

The FBI refused to accept the statements. Somebody in Kansas City was connected with the killings. An FBI Agent had been killed. They wouldn't be satisfied until they had the killers. Director J. Edgar Hoover issued an order:

Get 'em!"

The pressure was turned on. For a solid year FBI Agents assigned to solve the case swarmed all over Kansas City. They could learn nothing. The underworld had clammed up. The trail got colder and colder, and it seemed that the case never would be solved. And then a determined and tenacious

lawyer named Maurice Milligan was appointed United States District Attorney.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt personally made the appointment and Milligan took over the western district of Missouri, a wide jurisdictional area comprising sixty-six of the one-hundred and fourteen counties in the state, with Kansas City as the headquarters.

Prior to his appointment, Milligan was invited to Washington by Attorney General Homer S. Cummings for a conference. Cummings was vitally interested in determining whether Milligan had any connections in Kansas City that would make him hesitant about doing a thorough job of cleaning up the city no matter whom he would have to hurt, and that included Tom Pendergast.

Cummings said, "Kansas City is a hot spot, a crime center, one of three in this country. St. Paul and Chicago are the other two. These three cities, the hoods in them, have been linked to every kidnaping in the United States to date. I mean by that, that the three cities have been either the *situs* of the snatch, the place where the ransom payment has been made, or the hideout for the kidnapers."

"I want to say that we have checked you out and learned that you have no alliance with an criminally-allied political organization. I am thus ordering you to prosecute any and all persons who may be

involved in crimes regardless of their position politically or otherwise. I'm certain you understand exactly what I mean and to whom I refer here specifically."

Milligan replied that he understood perfectly, and he knew that the attorney general referred to Tom Pendergast, a man who was a close friend of President Roosevelt.

Cummings suspected what was going through Milligan's mind. He said, "The President is aware of the situation and is in accord with my instructions to you. I trust this will dispel whatever reluctance you may have harbored, if you had such a reluctance, to carry out your duties to the fullest."

"I assure you," Milligan answered, "that I did not entertain an iota of reluctance on any score."

"Good. We understand each other perfectly. I wish you every success and I assure you of every cooperation."

One of the first things Maurice Milligan did after assuming his duties was to ask that he be briefed on the progress of the investigation into the Union Station massacre. The echoes of that crime still resounded over the plaza. In the Kansas City office of the FBI the files bulged with information on the men suspected of having participated in the massacre. Teams of agents were still working on the case.

Milligan made an exhaustive study of each facet of the crime,

went over each clue with minute care. He was stymied. The case had run into a blank wall. There were some pertinent questions in his mind, however. Who had ordered Agents Lackey and Smith stopped when they were transporting Nash from Hot Springs? Who was it that had telephoned police authorities in Benton and Little Rock to say that a man had been kidnaped? The key to the whole puzzle seemed to lie in that.

Milligan sent FBI Agents into Hot Springs to check with the telephone company.

Records of the telephone company in Hot Springs revealed that on June 16, 1933, calls had been made from that city to Little Rock, Arkansas, Joplin, Missouri, and to Chicago. It was further revealed that Dick Galatas had made the calls to the police in Little Rock and Benton, and also to Joplin and Chicago. The question which arose now was, who had answered those calls to Joplin and Chicago?

Other agents, working in Chicago and Kansas City, learned that "Doc" Stacey had made a call to Kansas City from his O.P. Inn, and that Verne Miller had made a call from Kansas City to the O.P. Inn. Things were getting hot. Milligan felt that Johnny Lazia was mixed up in the affair in some fashion. If he were, it was very likely that he had had the okay from Tom Pendergast.

Milligan wanted first to talk to Dick Galatas but Galatas and his

wife had left Hot Springs. Herbie Farmer had left Joplin. Frances Nash had disappeared. And Verne Miller had taken his mistress, Vivian Mathias, and gone to parts unknown.

Agents learned that immediately after the massacre, Verne Miller had moved all his household goods to the home of Fritz Mulloy. And no one knew where Mulloy had gone or why he was mixed up in the entire affair.

In the basement of Verne Miller's abandoned bungalow, agents found several empty beer bottles. They picked these up on the bare chance they might contain fingerprints which would reveal other names, perhaps the names of the killers.

In tracing back all of the events that led up to the Union Station killings, Milligan learned of Sheriff Jack Killingsworth's encounter with Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti. He didn't connect this incident with the massacre because there had been nothing up to this moment to indicate that either Floyd or Richetti were mixed up in the affair. And then Milligan came across Mrs. Lottie West, the woman in charge of the Travelers Aid desk at the entrance of the Union Station.

Mrs. West, a motherly type of woman, prided herself on her memory and ability to read faces. The morning of the massacre she noticed a man sitting on a bench a few feet away from her desk.

"This man," Mrs. West told Mil-

ligan, "kept watching the gates where passengers came from arriving trains. I told myself that this man had a particularly cruel face but I didn't wish to condemn him solely on my own judgment, you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I understand, Mrs. West. What happened then?"

"Well, I tried a couple of times to engage him in light talk but he refused to answer any of my questions or to admit that it was even a nice day."

"I see. And what happened next, if you can recall?"

"Oh, yes, I can recall everything. I have a very excellent memory. The next time I saw this man was when he and two other men were around the car, the car where the shooting took place."

"Special Agent Caffrey's car?"

"Yes, I saw the whole thing. It was terrible. I found this policeman, Officer Fanning his name is, and I pointed to the police officers who had been shot and to the men who had shot them and were fleeing in another car. Officer Fanning shot at the car but didn't hit any of the men, I believe."

"Mrs. West, I have some photographs here that I want to show you. The man you saw in the station that morning and later around the car may be in the group of pictures."

He removed about a dozen photographs, showed them to her one at a time. When he showed her the



sixth photograph Mrs. West let out a shrill cry.

"That's him! That's him!" she exclaimed.

The photograph she picked out was that of Pretty Boy Floyd. She couldn't pick out Adam Richetti, however. This made some of the FBI Agents skeptical. They already had experienced a score or more of "Positive" identifications made by men and women who claimed they were eye witnesses to the killings.

They had picked out mug shots of Harvey Bailey, Wilbur Underhill and Robert Brady, and these were the men charged with the crime in the first indictment returned. The charges were dismissed, however, when investigation revealed that none of the three men could have been mixed up in the murders, although all three were notorious bank robbers and killers and members of the Ma Barker mob.

Milligan was inclined to go along with Mrs. West's identification despite the skepticism of the agents on the case.

Herbie Farmer and his wife were located and arrested. Mrs. Frank Nash was found in the home of her parents in Winona, Illinois. The FBI then learned that Verne Miller and Vivian Mathias were in Chicago. A trap was set but Miller escaped after a hectic running gun battle. Vivian, however, was arrested in the apartment she and Verne Miller had occupied. Fritz Mulloy and "Doc" Stacey were arrested. The case was beginning to take shape or so Milligan believed, hopefully.

Vivian Mathias refused to talk and she was charged with the crime of harboring a fugitive from justice, convicted and sentenced to a year and a day in prison. Her conviction developed nothing. She took her punishment with a shrug of her shoulders and a stoical attitude.

Frances Nash, however, broke under interrogation and told what she knew about the telephone calls that had been made and who had made them.

"Do you know Pretty Boy Floyd?" Milligan asked.

Frances Nash shook her head. "No, I don't. I never heard of him."

"Never heard your husband mention him in any way?"

"No, sir."

"How about Adam Richetti? Does that name ring a bell?"

She thought a moment then shook her head again. "No, sir."

"We have it on the strongest kind of informtaion that Floyd was one of the gunmen involved in the shootings at the Union Station. And possibly Richetti too. Did you ever hear their names mentioned by any one of the men who made those calls the day your husband was picked up by FBI agents?"

"No, sir."

"Think a little harder. Perhaps Dick Galatas mentioned one or the other or both of those men?"

"I don't think so."

"It's possible that he might have?"

"Not to me. Not in my presence."

"You're positive of that?"

"Yes, sir."

The agents exchanged knowing glances; and when Milligan looked around at the circle of men they shrugged their shoulders in meaningful gestures, as if to say, "Those two guys just can't be tied in with this thing. No one but Mrs. West has tied Floyd in. And no one has tied in Richetti."

Intensive investigations had revealed to the FBI that neither Floyd nor Richetti had been known to be connected in any way with Nash, Galatas, Miller, or "Doc Stacey. However, Mrs. West's positive identification bothered Milligan.

Several weeks after the gun battle with Miller in Chicago, the FBI learned that Detroit police had found a nude body wrapped in a

blanket under a railroad embankment.

The dead man had been viciously beaten and shot. He was Verne Miller. That left the FBI with a loose end dangling high in the air and a puzzling question to add to those they already had. Who had murdered Miller, and why? The answer that he was too hot, wouldn't leave, and Detroit hoods didn't want him around. Finis!

Maurice Milligan and the FBI agents on the case kept returning their thoughts to Floyd and Richetti. Despite the lack of evidence tying them in with the Union Station massacre there was the feeling that the two were deeply involved in it.

"If we're ever really to know," Milligan said, "we have to find Dick Galatas. That guy has the answer."

"And where the hell is he?" an agent asked.

"We'll find him," Milligan replied. "He'll turn up. He has to come out of his hole sooner or later."

"He's been in it a long time," another agent said.

Then, out of a clear sky, came the break in the case. A magazine devoted to stories of crime and criminals printed in each issue a list of names and a column of photos of fugitives from justice. Galatas' photo and description appeared in one of the issues.

A reader of the magazine recognized Galatas in New Orleans, fol-

lowed him into a building, and then reported his find to the FBI. Dick Galatas and his wife were arrested. Then came another break.

Fingerprints on one of the beer bottles found in Verne Miller's bungalo proved to be those of Adam Richetti. There was now an established link between Verne Miller and Adam Richetti, and it was logical to assume that if Richetti was linked to Miller then Pretty Boy Floyd had to be also.

Frances Nash had told Milligan and the FBI that when she talked with Miller by telephone on the day her husband was picked up by Agents Lackey and Smith she was told by Miller that plans had been made to rescue her husband. This told Milligan that Miller must have been one of the killers in the massacre. When Galatas and his wife were questioned they both corroborated Frances Nash's statements. Neither, however, could name the two other men.

During Milligan's investigation an attempt was made to kill Jimmy LaCapra. He escaped execution by running to a shelter and then racing into a post office. A second attempt was made to kill him and once again he escaped. He gave himself up to the FBI on charges of violating the Dyer Act, taking a stolen car across a state line. He was questioned intensively about the massacre.

"LaCapra," an agent said, "you've got a real good chance of winding up with a life bit on Alcatraz unless

you come clean with us on the Union Station killings. We have enough on you to charge you with being a principal. You take it from there."

"All I know is that on the night of June 16, 1933, Verne Miller came to Johnny Lazia's apartment and told him that a friend of his was being brought from Hot Springs to Kansas City by FBI agents and he wanted him sprung. Would Lazia help him?"

"What did Lazia say?"

"He said it would be too much risk for his own men. However, Floyd and Richetti were in town, that they just blew in that night. He'd just got the word. He said that he would arrange a meet between Miller and Floyd and Richetti and that Miller could talk to them."

"Did Lazia arrange the meet?"

"Yeah, he did."

"What happened then?"

"Floyd and Richetti agreed to help. They drove to the Union Station in one car and Miller drove there in another car. They met at an appointed place and then all three waited for the agents and Jelly Nash to appear. The plan had been to scare the agents by flashing the machine guns, take Nash and leave. That one cop who started shooting spoiled the whole plan when he tried to shoot it out with Floyd, Richetti, and Miller."

LaCapra shrugged. "It was one of those things, that's all."

The FBI now had definite in-

formation that Floyd and Richetti were the other two men in the Union Station massacre. *WANTED* bulletins for the Union Station massacre were published on them and scores of FBI agents began to comb the country for them. They became the two hottest packages in the country.

Shortly after LaCapra's statements to the FBI, police officers in a small town in Ohio were making a routine inspection of a city park when they saw a couple of men sleeping in a secluded spot. They awakened the two and started to question them since they were strangers in town. One of the two men drew a gun and started shooting.

While the shooting was going on the other man ran. The one who did the shooting was overpowered and thrown into jail. He refused to give his name but when his fingerprints were checked he proved to be Adam Richetti. It was inferred then that the man who had escaped was Pretty Boy Floyd.

The FBI rushed into action, hurried to the place near Liverpool, Ohio, where Floyd was last seen. Leading the group of agents into the Ohio town were Melvin H. Purvis, who less than a year later was to kill John Dillinger in Chicago, and some of the top man-hunters of the FBI.

Purvis and his men nailed Floyd in an out-of-the-way farmhouse several miles from where Richetti

was captured. He tried to escape by shooting it out with the agents but he didn't have a chance. He was riddled with about fifty slugs and died in a field.

Adam Richetti was returned to Kansas City to stand trial for his part in the Kansas City massacre. He refused to say that he had had anything to do with it, that he knew or had ever met, nodded, or said hello to Johnny Lazia, Verne Miller, or Pretty Boy Floyd, or that he had ever been in Kansas City. The jury disbelieved him, went along with the evidence presented and convicted him. He was sentenced to death and duly executed.

All the conspirators were also tried. Vivian Mathias pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charges but because she had already served a term for harboring Verne Miller she was given probation. Esther Farmer and Elizabeth Galatas were also given probationary terms. Because she took the stand and told of her part in the plot, Frances Nash was granted immunity and walked out of court entirely free.

Dick Galatas denied he had had any connection with the plot in any way, as did "Doc" Stacey, Herbie Farmer and Fritz Mulloy. All were convicted and sentenced to Alcatraz for long terms.

"You've shaken up this town harder than I ever thought it could be shaken. You've brought the heat of hell on us. I told you to clean it up. I told you to get every hood

out of the city and to see to it that it was kept clean for a long time. I smelled something wrong. But no, you had to do it your way.

"I have never gone back on a friend in my life. My whole career has been based on friendships. But in your case, and right now, I'm ready to give up on you. I don't know where the hell this will lead but I'll tell you one thing—this guy Milligan is out to get me. That much I know, and if he does then you're going to be all through." He pounded the desk with a fist. "I don't know why the hell I don't kick you out right now."

A short time later, on a warm August midnight in 1934, three men stepped from a hideout in front of an apartment building in a fashionable section of Kansas City as Johnny Lazia stepped out of the building. Two of the men were holding machine guns.

"Hello, Johnny," one of the men with a machine gun said. "You going some place?"

Lazia looked at the men and his face was suddenly white with terror.

"What is this?" he asked. "You guys heisting me?"

The man who had spoken said, "Johnny, you've run out of time, and there's no place for you to go. This is it."

"You guys can't do this. The Boss will hamstring you."

The three men laughed. "There ain't no more Boss, Johnny. We're taking over. You're first." As he

finished speaking he leveled the machine gun at Lazia's middle. The other man with the machine gun also leveled his weapon.

"Don't!" Lazia yelled. "Don't!"

The machine guns exploded and about thirty slugs riddled Lazia's body. He collapsed to the ground. The friend of Boss Pendergast, the big man of Kansas City, died a dismal death, the way most of the hoods of the era had died before him. Tom Pendergast sent a huge floral wreath.

This left one more principal to be dealt with either by the law or the underworld. Jimmy LaCapra. LaCapra knew that he could not remain in Kansas City because some of Lazia's men were after him for the testimony he gave. He fled to New York. He was found a short time later along a New York highway with a bullet hole through his head. There was no escaping the underworld vengeance.

Milligan now turned his attention to Tom Pendergast. The Boss was the head of the Jackson County Democratic Club and could name his own local slate and elect each candidate by a landslide vote. He had connections in Jefferson City and in the many other county seats and so could name State officials as well as delegates to the Democratic National Conventions. He did it mostly through fraudulent elections.

Pendergast was an extreme realist, left nothing to chance. He had an

uncanny political judgment and his decisions were reached swiftly and with exactness. He could have given Tammany Hall cards and spades and beat them at their own game. Al Capone learned a great deal from Pendergast and used it to advantage in taking over Cicero.

Pendergast's followers never questioned his judgment and no army was better disciplined and trained than the Boss' tight organization. Every district had its captain and each captain saw to it that every man in the district voted. Just as an army travels on its belly so was Pendergast's army fed upon patronage.

Each of his captains was on either a city or county payroll. Their job was to cultivate the good will of the voters. They squared any and all beefs. They saw to it that families were not in need of food, or coal in winter, or jobs for the family provider. If a wayward son happened to get into trouble with the law they were right there to fix it. This was Capone's way too. Favors for votes. On election day the captains provided cars in which to transport the voters to the polls.

The underworld contributed untold thousands of dollars toward the funds necessary to keep the political machine well oiled and to promote its success.

During the municipal election of 1934, Jesse W. Barrett, Republican candidate for Governor of Missouri,

told a Kansas City audience the story of that election.

"We all remember the pictures of the hospital wards filled with men who were broken and bruised by the gangsters who assaulted them at the polls. You remember that flood of fraudulent votes. You were baptized in blood, but the contest was won by the machine. The score was four murders, two hundred assaults, and one hundred thousand felonies."

Milligan had no evidence as yet that he could tie in with vote frauds by Pendergast, nothing that is that would stand up in court. He knew, however, that Pendergast was guilty of every crime in the book as it pertained to election frauds. He bided his time.

In the August 1936 primary, Lawrence McDaniel, a well-known St. Louis lawyer, ran for the State Supreme Court against Judge Ernest S. Gantt, a Pendergast machine candidate. McDaniel carried a rather substantial majority of the 114 counties in Missouri and the City of St. Louis. However, there was Kansas City. This is what Pendergast did to McDaniel's lead.

In the First Ward Gant got 18,919 votes to 18 for McDaniel, a ratio of 1,045 to one. In the Second Ward Gant got 19,201 votes to 13 for McDaniel, a ratio of 1,469 to one. In the last presidential election a vote of 41,805 was cast by the 38,401 babies, children and adults of these two wards!

The *Kansas City Star*, working with Milligan, sent reporters and photographers into the various wards to collect documentary evidence of irregularities in the registrations.

They uncovered some sensational evidence. Addresses of residences housing from ten to thirty registrants, according to the election board records, turned out to be vacant lots or gas stations. Reporters also found that dwellings accommodating from three to five persons were padded with from ten to fifteen "phantom" voters as shown by the investigators.

These facts were presented to the Governor of Missouri and to the election commissioners of Kansas City. Nothing was done about it.

Milligan took his findings to U.S. District Judge Merrill E. Otis and asked that a grand jury be called to delve more deeply into the situation. In his attempts to build a strong case against Pendergast, Milligan came up with a statute which seemed to apply to the situation. The statute was enacted shortly after the Civil War and became known as the Civil Rights Statute. It is Section 19 of the Criminal Code (Section 5508 R.S. 18 U.S.C.A. 51) and reads as follows:

If two or more persons shall conspire to injure, threaten, or intimidate any citizen in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him by the Constitution or

laws of the United States, or because of his having exercised the same they shall be fined not more than \$5000 and imprisoned not more than ten years.

Milligan now felt that he was on safe ground and advised in writing the Honorable Albert L. Reeves, United States District Judge, whose turn it was to impanel the jury, of his conclusions on the legal questions involved. Judge Reeves ordered a grand jury to be empaneled on December 14, 1936.

Judge Reeves, a gray-haired veteran of the Federal courts, grim and determined, summoned jurors from the whole of the Western District of Missouri except from Kansas City and Jackson County. This meant that the Pendergast forces could not stack the jury! It was a severe blow.

Judge Reeves' charge to the jury received wide publicity, not only in Missouri but throughout the United States, and it was obvious that it rocked Kansas City.

"Gentlemen, Judge Reeves said, "there is a crying need for the purification of the ballot in America. I can't sit quietly in my district, charged as I am with responsibility, and witness some man going with corrupt fingers to the ballot box. A corrupt vote may be likened to a loaded and cocked gun pointed at the very heart of America. These conditions shame Kansas City."

"You have a wide range of in-

quiry. Don't stop until you have reached the uttermost parts of the city and into the ballot boxes of all districts to stop corruption of the ballot in this district. Gentlemen, reach for all, even if you find them in the highest authority. Move on them!"

Tom Pendergast was in New York when Judge Reeves empaneled the grand jury. He was interviewed by reporters.

"I have been investigated for forty years," he declared. "If Reeves and Milligan can find anything wrong I'll not squawk."

The important thing in the case, Milligan knew, were the ballots themselves, the most vital evidence if he hoped to carry on a successful prosecution. Immediately after Judge Reeves had empaneled the jury, the United States marshal, acting upon detailed instructions and armed with *subpoenas duces tecum*, served upon all members of the election board the writs to produce before the grand jury forthwith all books, ballots, records, ballot boxes, and other such election paraphernalia in their custody.

Several hours after the members of the election board had been served, Milligan was visited by some dozen of the members and was told that it would take at least two or three days to deliver the ballots and records.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Milligan said. "I heard nothing of two or three days. I want to advise you

that if the ballots are not delivered immediately the members of the board will be in jail for contempt of court long before the two or three days are up."

By eight o'clock that night truck loads of ballots and records weighing approximately twelve tons were delivered to the U.S. Marshal, Henry L. Dillingham and stored in the vaults of the Federal Building.

Experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation were called in to assist in examining the ballots. Ballots sealed in sacks were carried into the grand jury room and the first one opened contained positive proof that ninety-five ballots had been changed from straight Republican votes to straight Democratic votes. Ninety-five citizens of that small precinct had been deprived of their rights under the laws and the Constitution of the United States to have their votes counted as cast.

Judges and clerks were made defendants in the indictments. Precinct captains, challengers, ward bosses and committeemen and women of both parties, and in a number of instances, police officers who were ostensibly the guardians of the polling places, were subjected to indictment.

The evidence against Pendergast was so strong that his two leading lawyers in the battery of attorneys who were defending him advised him to plead guilty. They were John G. Madden and R. R. Brewster.

"Tom," Madden said, "you

haven't got a snowball's chance in hell to win this one. The cards are all stacked against you. I feel very strongly that if you plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court that we can get a light sentence."

Pendergast turned to Brewster. "What's your opinion on this?"

"I agree with John. We don't have a chance."

Brewster made an impassioned plea for clemency. He pointed out the many fine things Pendergast had done for the city, the improvements for which he was responsible—slum clearances, the construction of many roads, the first of the super highways, the many charitable contributions, the feeding and clothing of the poor and needy.

As he spoke it seemed that Pendergast grew older, grayer, bent, a man at bay in the mesh of his own making. The Boss had suddenly become a broken old man.

John G. Madden also pleaded for clemency. He too spoke of the good things for which Pendergast was responsible, mentioned his advanced age and the fact that a long prison term would surely mean his death.

Judge Merrill E. Otis knew Pendergast's background, the why of his charities, and that The Boss had profited handsomely from the building of roads and other construction projects. Judge Otis also knew that Pendergast's plea of guilty was not only a defense tactic but that it was to save many promi-

nent persons in Kansas City embarrassment.

If the entire sordid story of the Pendergast machine had been revealed from the witness stand, as Milligan had intended to do in his cross-examination it would have humiliated dozens of men high in politics and in business.

Judge Otis sentenced Pendergast to fifteen months in prison and fined him \$10,000. He also decreed that he was to pay back taxes, penalties, and interest to the amount of \$434,000. On a second count, Judge Otis sentenced Pendergast to three more years, suspended the sentence and ordered it to be served on probation.

Pendergast was allowed to return to his home before starting the trip to the Leavenworth Penitentiary. On the way home he dropped James M. Pendergast, his nephew, at the Jackson County Democratic Club, 1908 Main Street, with the understanding that his nephew was to take over the leadership of the Pendergast political machine.

Many newspaper editors, particularly those in St. Louis, bitterly assailed the verdict. They had expected a much more severe sentence. The St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* declared in its editorial page that "The enormity of Pendergast's crime is such it merited a far heavier sentence."

Pendergast was driven to prison by his son, Thomas J. Pendergast, Jr., and his nephew and political

successor, James M. Pendergast. He was a sorry looking old man as he stood before the gates of the prison. He was handed a blue denim uniform and spent the usual thirty days in quarantine.

There were enough Pendergast henchmen in Leavenworth when he was admitted to form a club had they been allowed to hold a reunion with their boss. A great many of the vote fraud crowd were doing time there.

Even in prison Thomas J. Pendergast, Sr., was regarded as a big shot and given preferential treatment but this may have been because he was a sick man most of the time. The spring was gone from his step and he walked with a decided slouch to his once powerful shoulders. The pictures of him that were released from the prison to the press revealed a face lined with tragedy. The publication of these pictures, a most unusual departure from established custom, was the most humiliating experience connected with Pendergast's long career.

He was assigned to the hospital as a clerk upon his release from quarantine but he was as much a patient as he was a worker in the hospital. Shortly after his commitment he suffered a dangerous heart attack which, together with an intestinal disorder, placed him on the critical list.

The man who had once been likened to John L. Sullivan, the great bare-fisted fighter who was as

strong as a young bull, was beyond recognition. Pendergast had been a tough man in his youth, a man willing to fight at the drop of a hat, and few men wanted to challenge him. Thus was the deterioration of a political giant, his degradation, and his abysmal decline.

He was finally released from prison and returned to Kansas City on probation. He was allowed to live at his mansion on Ward Parkway, but he could not leave the city, and was not allowed to engage in politics.

Since he was technically still a felon, his rights of citizenship were for the time being revoked. This was a severe blow to him.

He was a lonely man. His wife had forsaken him after he went to prison, and this, perhaps, was his crowning sorrow. During the day he took solitary drives through the city he had long dominated or went on short walks near his mansion. He became seriously ill shortly after, and was taken to Menorah Hospital, and there, on a simple cot, he died at 9:40 P.M. on January 26, 1945.

The last words he uttered before he died were strange ones, and no one really knew exactly what he meant. He murmured, "I'm sorry," and then closed his eyes on a deep sigh.

Funeral services for Pendergast, the man who had once had an audience with the Pope, were held in the Visitation Catholic Church, in

Kansas City, and he was buried in Calvary Cemetery, in the same city. He was a member of that church, and according to Monsignor Thomas B. McDonald, was a regular contributor to the Little Sisters of the Poor, a home for the aged, and many other Catholic institutions.

Harry S. Truman, then Vice-

President of the United States, said, "I'm extremely sorry to hear of his death. He was my friend and I was his."

Truman flew to Kansas City in an Army bomber to attend the funeral of his friend, and if this may be called a eulogy you may accept it as such.



Another New TRUE Crime Gangland Thriller Coming Soon

NUCKY JOHNSON: THE MAN WHO STOLE ATLANTIC CITY

by DAVID MAZROFF

The pleasure capitol of the Eastern seaboard it was, and Nucky Johnson held Atlantic City in the palm of his well greased hand. Prostitution, gambling and other rackets were netting more than ten million a year, and a cool million was going into Johnson's pockets. This is the incredible story of a man who owned a town—of his strange rise and stranger fall . . .

HERE, KITTY

by J. SIMMONS SCHEB

She was not too young to live,
to love. He nodded. Not too
young to die—not too young . . .

HE COULD see her through the window. She was small and dark and lovely. But she was Bradley Pearson's wife, and she was not too lovely to die.

Through narrowed eyes, he watched her come around the corner from the darkened bedroom area, where, he knew, she'd been checking on the children.

He knew because he'd been watching her for a week. She'd get a cup of coffee now, and then she'd watch the ten o'clock program on her fancy color television set. At eleven o'clock, she'd get up and put out the cat, and then she'd watch the news. At eleven-fifteen she'd start



coaxing the cat back in. That was when he would get her.

Gracefully, she glided across the carpeted floor and swung around into the kitchen, where she was out of sight for a minute. He waited. She'd be back.

Pushing his dark hair out of his eyes, he stepped back a pace or two. She came then, slowly, balancing the steaming, too-full cup, watching it intently with her big, long-lashed eyes. The tip of her pink tongue flicked out and moistened her lower lip.

He blouse was white and tight and sleeveless, and strong muscles rippled under her yellow slacks. She turned her back to the window and stood for a minute, head cocked at the television screen. His hand dipped into his pocket, and he fingered his switchblade knife.

Silently, he moved in close to the house again, pulled at his black sweatshirt and watched her settle down on the couch, tucking one leg under her and reaching out with her free hand for the sleeping kitten. A chill went through him, even though it was a very warm night for June.

June. June 4. It had been exactly one month since Bradley Pearson had fired him. It would be a very good night for murder.

Country clubs had never been along his line, anyway. And Forest Lakes was too new, too sleek, too spotlessly clean and perfect. The people were artificial, too. They got all dressed up in their fancy

clothes and went out there and drank themselves silly and ate too much expensive food and made fools of themselves. He hated all of them.

But most of all, he hated Bradley Pearson. The manager of Forest Lakes Country Club was too big and handsome, too immaculately dressed at all times to be real. Even his name sounded phoney. To the members, he was Mr. Charming. But to the hired help . . .

"Boy!" When Bradley Pearson snapped his fingers, the hired help was supposed to go running, answering to the stupid name of "boy," mopping up other people's messes.

The man who had spilled the drink was a big, fat blob of a man, a wealthy banker in town. He'd had every break that life had to offer, but he couldn't hold his liquor. Brad Pearson was dabbing at him with a napkin, assuring him that everything was all right.

"Boy!" he shouted again. "Boy!"

Boy! He was twenty-two years old! He knew more about life than either one of them ever would. He'd been through everything from a broken home to a two-year stretch for car theft, but just because he'd never been to college, just because he'd given up on that stupid high school.

He hated them. He picked up a sponge and started in their direction, but he felt like a monkey on a string. He even had on the stupid little red jacket. He clenched his

teeth and felt the muscle in his jaw begin to work.

"Mr. Van Wert's drink has been spilled," Bradley Pearson was saying in his best country-club-manager voice. He did not say that Mr. Van Wert had spilled his drink. He said that "the drink had been spilled."

"Please clean it up for him and see that he gets a new one."

He didn't answer. He didn't say a word. He just began swabbing, and if he sloshed a little over on Mrs. Van Wert's dress, it wasn't because he meant to. It was damn stupid of Pearson to get so ugly about it.

"Can't you be a little more careful?" he said.

"Sorry, sir. She should of got out of the way."

"And you should have got a haircut," Van Wert put in unexpectedly. "Then maybe you could see what you were doing!"

"I'll handle my hair," he said. "You just handle your liquor." The words had come out without warning, but he wasn't sorry he'd said them. Surprised, maybe, but not sorry. He stood for a minute, looking down at them and breathing hard, and then, slamming the sponge in Van Wert's lap, he walked out.

"Boy!" Pearson caught him just outside the door. "You needn't bother to come back."

"I didn't plan to," he said.

"And Mr. Van Wert's right, you know. I told you to get a haircut."

"Mr. Van Wert can go to hell."

"He might," Pearson said, smiling that superior smile of his, "but I'd say, off-hand, that you might get there first if you don't get a haircut, some education and a whole new attitude for yourself."

"And you can go to hell, too."

"No, thanks," Bradley Pearson said. "I'm very happy where I am."

Was it any wonder that he hated Brad Pearson?

At the employment agency, they refused to pay him his insurance.

"Sorry, son. We've talked to Mr. Pearson about you. It seems you weren't really let go through no fault of your own. Seems you got pretty ugly and were fired."

The man was another pompous ass. He wore a shirt, a tie and heavy, black-rimmed glasses. He sat at a cruddy formica-topped desk and acted like it was a throne.

"Mr. Pearson won't recommend you for another bus-boy job," he said, "but we do have an opening here for yard work."

Yard work! Gawd, how he hated yard work. What was he? A moron?

But two weeks later, he went back in and took it. He got hungry, and the landlady got after him for the rent, and it was better than washing dishes.

He worked for a big, dumb guy named Keralski. It was his job to weed around fences and plants. It was hot, dirty work, and he hated it. Keralski had about forty or fifty lawns lined up, and all he did was sit on his big, fat riding mower, and

then collect the money. Keralski had it made.

The day was blistering hot. The sun beat down on his back, and the sweat oozed out of his pores and mixed with the dirt to make mud all over his skin. It itched, and his shoulders cried out in pain.

The yard was a big one, and the man who owned it a devil. He sat back on his heels for a minute—just a minute—to watch Keralski on the mower.

"Keralski pay you for watching him?" the man bellowed from over and above him.

A hard knot formed in his stomach, and he turned and squinted up into the flabby unsmiling, face.

"Ordinarily, I'd do it all myself," the man said, swelling his chest out, "but I had a heart attack, and I got to take it easy for awhile. Get that weed over there. And chase that cat out of here. I can't stand cats in my yard!"

It was only a little cat, and at first it thought he was playing. It jumped up, exposing a stark-white stomach, and then it scampered toward him again, its black back hunched Halloween-style, its white paws sparkling in the sun.

"Get it out of here!" the man who owned the house yelled. His face turned red, and for a minute, he looked like he was crazy. Then he picked up a yard tool and threw it as hard as he could. The cat scampered.

"Damned animal!" the man

screamed. "Some day I'm gonna kill it. I've got me a gun in the house, and some day I'm gonna use it!"

Rubbing his dirty arm across his sweating eyebrows, he lumbered over toward the hedge to get the three-pronged tool the man had thrown, and that was when he had seen Brad Pearson in the yard next door, just getting into his red convertible, waving good-by to the attractive little thing in shorts who stood with the cat in her arms. Two young children were playing on a swing set around on the other side of the house. The whole picture looked like it could have come out of a magazine.

That night, he went back. He checked the name on the mail box. Bradley W. Pearson, it said. He could see it plainly in the moonlight.

The house was quiet. Only a few lights burned, and those in the living area. The windows were open. The television blared. The woman, Bradley W. Pearson's wife, appeared from around a corner. His heart beat faster and harder.

At first he thought he wanted Pearson himself. He'd be home about midnight, he knew. It was later on weekends, of course, but about midnight during the week. He always stayed and closed up the club.

He waited. He saw the woman put out the cat, then get it in again later. It was playful, and she had

to chase it. She could tell where it was because it wore a little red collar with bells.

The moon was pretty full that night, and when she put out the cat, she turned on a yard lamp that made it even lighter. He shrank into the shadows of the hedge and trees and covered his face with his arms. She came within yards of him, but he had been smart and worn black, and he managed to crouch low enough and stay still enough to escape being seen by her.

Brad Pearson came home and parked his car in the garage and didn't come out again. The garage was attached to the house. He appeared in the living room and took the woman into his arms. They kissed, and then they had a drink together, and then they disappeared toward the bedroom area.

On the third night of this, he decided that Brad Pearson would suffer more alive than dead. If he came home from his precious job and found his precious wife in the yard, her throat slashed, her pretty little face cut to pieces—

But the moon was still too bright. He waited. He didn't mind. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed it. He watched her as she came out every night and put the kitten down, and then he watched her again when she came out and tried to catch it.

Usually, she wore slacks sometimes, tight-fitting shorts. She always stepped outside the front door and stood there a minute, calling.



"Here, Kitty," she'd say. "Here, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty."

And then she would walk out further and further until she was outside the circle of light, calling and coaxing and chasing the stupid little cat.

There had been another girl very much like her once. She was rounder and not quite so pretty, and her clothes hadn't been so expensive, but she'd been very desirable, anyway. She'd led him on for months, and then she'd told him to get lost, and she had married somebody else.

Tonight, the moon was only a fingernail moon, and it seemed very far away. From time to time, clouds drifted under it, and then it was dark as hell.

At eleven o'clock the television flashed on the news. She unwound herself from the couch and came

o the door with the cat. The outside lights went on.

He stepped back into the shadows. He'd taken the precaution of smearing his face with dirt, the way fighting men do in the movies. He stood very still, fondling the knife in his pocket.

She put the cat down outside and shook a finger at it.

"Now, you be a good boy," she said, "and come back when I call you."

He watched the cat. It played for a minute inside the circle of light, and then it darted across the yard and ran halfway up a tree, jumped down and swatted at the empty air.

He knew he had to be careful. The days were hot, but the nights were not yet unbearable, and the people in these houses hadn't closed up to air-condition yet.

He got down on his hands and knees, outside the circle of light.

"Here, Kitty, Kitty," he called.

The sound of the television in Mrs. Pearson's would cover his voice, he knew, but he had to whisper because of the man next door. There was no light over there and no sound. The place had been like a tomb since ten o'clock. But he had no way of knowing just how soundly the man next door slept.

The cat stopped and turned and cocked its head at him. His eyes were accustomed to the dark, and he could make out the white on its chest and face. He wiggled a finger in the grass. It watched a minute,

then bounced forward two steps and stopped.

"Here Kitty," he whispered. "Here, Kitty." He felt his nerve-ends begin to frazzle. *"Damn stupid cat,"* he thought. *"Why won't it come over here?"*

It crept forward slowly, and then it was just inches beyond his reach. It crouched and kept its eyes on the wiggling grass, but it didn't move a muscle. He thought for a minute that he might scream. His knees ached, and his whole body went taught with impatience, but he forced himself to stay still, except for the moving finger.

It must have taken five minutes. It seemed like forever. But at last the cat jumped, so quickly and expertly that it would have slipped away again if it hadn't been for the collar.

It squawked when he pulled it toward him. It twisted and tried to scratch. It bit his thumb, right down close to his stubby nail. He sucked in his breath and swore softly.

He showed no mercy, but he didn't kill it, either. He had nothing against cats, personally. He could take them or leave them. He wasn't like the guy next door.

Holding it firmly in his left hand, he struggled to his feet and ran quickly, crouching low, over to the shelter of the hedge. There, he squatted down between two big bushes and waited.

The news ended. The newscaster said good night. Then the television

sound snapped off, the door opened, and she was outside again.

"Here, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty," she called.

He took the knife out of his pocket, snapped it open, waited. She took a few steps forward. She was still in the circle of light.

It was very quiet, now that the television set was off. There was no traffic in this quiet suburban area, and the two houses, with their wide lawns and their deep front yards, were the only two houses on the block. There was a distant sound of squeaking crickets, but it was so low and so steady that it seemed almost like no sound at all.

He could hear himself breathing, so he closed his mouth and forced himself to inhale and exhale more softly. There was nothing he could do about the loud pounding of his heart.

The cat meowed, and the woman turned her head directly toward him.

He wiggled further back into the bushes.

"Kitty, Kitty-boy!" She stepped outside the lighted circle. "I hear you. I know where you are now."

She moved around toward the darkened side of the house, where he was. Every nerve in his body began to tingle. She was coming closer. Her outfit was white and yellow and, with the light at her back, he could see her very clearly.

"Come on, Kitty," she said. "Don't tease me tonight. I'm tired.

She stopped and looked around. She wasn't sure, now, just where the sound had come from.

Carefully, he moved one finger and jingled the bell on the collar. She heard it. She laughed and started forward again.

"I hear you, you little rascal. You'd better get back here in your own yard."

He jingled the bell again. She was walking too slowly! She stopped and crouched down and squinted into the bushes. He couldn't wait! He jingled the bell a third time, and with the other hand—the one with the knife in it—he jiggled the bush a little.

He never knew which came first—the sound of the shot or the pain. He pitched forward on his face. The woman screamed. The man yelled.

"I told you to keep that damned animal out of my yard, Mrs. Pearson. I told you I'd shoot it some day!"

The pain burned right through his middle. His chin ground into the grass and the dirt. His arms and hands had stiffened at first, but then slowly his fingers relaxed, and the cat ran out into the yard. The woman scooped it up. Behind him a heavy door slammed.

He opened his mouth, but the sound that came out was nothing that a frog couldn't make. His head rolled over to one side, and there was a bitter taste in his mouth.

He wondered what they'd think in the morning.

DANGER FOR MR. WONG

Mei Wong loved treasures, including the most precious of all, his life. Now he was about to lose it. Unless . . .



a new MEI WONG story by DAN ROSS

MEI WONG stood before the large window overlooking Bombay's harbor with a placid expression on his broad face. It was the customary period of quiet that he always en-

joyed in the late afternoon. Far beyond the stuccoed and sprawling Indian metropolis, past the busy Alexandria docks lay the calm and tranquility of the bay itself. A great

white ocean liner waiting regally for a pilot boat in striking contrast to several Arab dhows that sailed swiftly past it with colorful sails a-tilt.

It was a view of which he never tired. Only the urgency of a pressing task caused him to turn with a small sigh and pad across to sit once again behind his broad mahogany desk.

Picking up a slim artist's brush, he dipped it into a well of purplish liquid and resumed his task of decorating a delicately shaped white vase.

Absorbed in his work, Wong did not immediately notice when the door of his studio was opened and a sallow, hard-faced man in a dirty linen suit stepped quietly in.

The intruder's face twisted as he watched the stout old Chinese art dealer, so pleasantly occupied here in his crimson-walled studio with its treasures of jade, ivory, china and tapestries. Within the next few minutes Mei Wong would bid farewell to all this—because he was going to murder him.

The hard-faced man broke the silence. "You have a visitor, Mei Wong."

Mei Wong raised his bland, fat face. An expression of surprise flicked across his features as recognition came.

"Blake," he said tonelessly. "So you've come back"

"Yes, I'm back," the sallow man's voice was filled with menace. "Just

as I promised I would be." He reached in his pocket and drew out a small evil-looking automatic and pointed it at Mei Wong. "You had your moment in court when you testified against me. Now I'm here to settle the account."

The old art dealer stared at him. "You think I should pay a penalty for telling the truth?"

"Truth!" Blake laughed contemptuously. "Don't let's waste time moralizing. All you were interested in was revenge! And that's why I'm here now. It's my turn."

Mei Wong shook his head in solemn negation. "On the contrary, I set great store on truth, whether it be in the form of a work of art or a simple statement. Truth is priceless to me."

"Your truth cost me five years in a rotten prison," Blake rasped.

"You robbed with violence," Mei Wong reminded him. "It was right that you should pay. But you and I have no quarrel. As things stand now wouldn't you be wise to forgive the whole sorry affair?"

"Not likely!" The sallow man said. "I'm here to finish you and help myself to a few of your trinkets."

"You'll find them hard to dispose of," Mei Wong said, and shuddered with resignation. "Most of my collection are well known pieces." He paused an instant. "And now, if you will excuse me, I must finish decorating this dragon vase. A messenger is on the way for it now."

If it should not be ready it might arouse suspicion. You wouldn't want that, I'm sure."

The intruder's hard gray eyes studied the vase. "What is this masterpiece?"

Mei Wong calmly lifted a brush and dipped it into the liquid and began to paint delicate purple Chinese letters on the white surface. "It is a piece sent me by a fellow countryman, Tu San. He owns a shop catering to the tourist trade and sometimes sends me items for decoration. Actually the pieces are quite perfect in themselves but the tourists prefer some symbols on them. The ink I use is of my own invention and unique because of its quick drying and long lasting quality."

"Make a good job if it," Blake advised. "It's going to be your last one."

"Well," the old art dealer said, "at least I shall have the pleasure of spending my final moments at a well-loved task. Few are so fortunate!" He bent over the vase and quickly ringed it with lettering. "I have a great love for the ancient Chinese alphabet."

Wong was still working at the vase when there was a knock on the studio door. He lifted his eyes to Blake and said, "The messenger."

"No tricks," the sallow man warned. "Get rid of him."

Mei Wong gave a tired nod. Lifting his huge body from his chair, he padded across to the door and



let the messenger in. Without any suspicious moves he placed the vase in a box and handed it to the boy.

"Warn your master to be careful of it," he said. "It is barely dry." And he saw the boy on his way again.

Closing the door Mei Wong found himself alone with the intruder. The gun was once more out of Blake's pocket and pointed at him. The art dealer asked, "Surely you're not serious about taking my life?"

"I've been thinking about it for five years and the satisfaction it will give me," Blake said.

"Satisfaction!" Mei Wong sighed and then moved slowly over to the window overlooking the harbor again. "Men derive pleasure from many things. As for myself, one of the happiest moments of the day comes when the late afternoon sun shines on the bay out there."

"Sunlight on cold cash interests me more!" Blake came closer to him. "Better think up some fancy greetings for your ancestors. You'll soon be meeting them."

As Blake raised the automatic Mei Wong raised a staying hand.

"One moment," he said. "Since you place such a great premium on wealth I will make you an offer. Allow me a few minutes so that I may know the rich enjoyment of seeing the setting sun on these waters one last time and I will repay you with treasure."

Blake eyed him suspiciously. "Where's the cash?"

"You will find out after I have watched the sunset," Mei Wong said.

The intruder seated himself on the corner of the desk and stared at the old man. "Five minutes and that's it!"

Mei Wong nodded. Turning his back to him, he looked placidly out the window.

The minutes went by in taut silence.

Then Blake got to his feet and came toward the art dealer.

"All right," he said. "Now let's get this settled."

"Drop your gun first!" A taut new voice came suddenly from the other end of the studio.

Blake wheeled in surprise to find himself staring at a tall, swarthy man with a black beard who stood in the open studio doorway, flanked

by two well-armed members of the Bombay police.

"Don't try anything foolish," the tall man warned in a low, precise voice.

Blake sagged and let his gun drop to the floor.

As he did so, Mei Wong stepped forward.

"Thank you, Inspector Bannerjee," he said. "I had not hoped for such swift police action."

Bannerjee nodded grimly. "You wouldn't have gotten it if I hadn't happened to be downstairs in the hotel on other business. Tu San's customer was waiting and he opened your package as soon as it came. He expected the dragon vase to bear the customary Chinese proverb; when instead he read your message: 'Threatened by killer' repeated around it he guessed you were in trouble and came hurrying out to the lobby to tell me."

Blake turned to Mei Wong with a look of hatred on his sallow features. "You and your bleating about truth! Truth didn't count for quite so much when it came to saving your own skin!"

Mei Wong regarded him with mingled scorn and pity.

"On the contrary," he said, "I was quite truthful. I promised a treasure if you would allow me a few minutes. Now I have bestowed it, one no amount of money could purchase. I prevented you from becoming a murderer."

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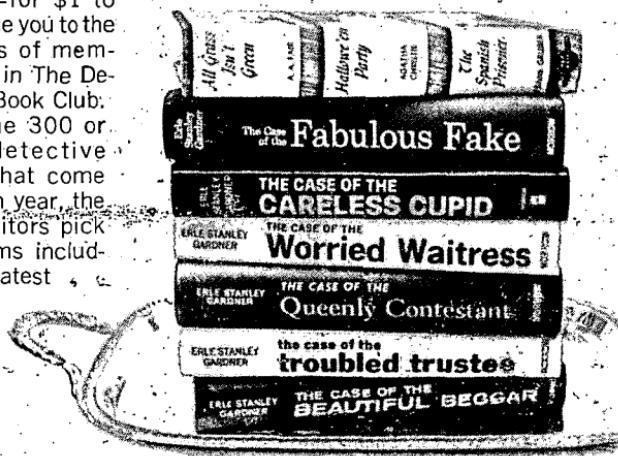
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